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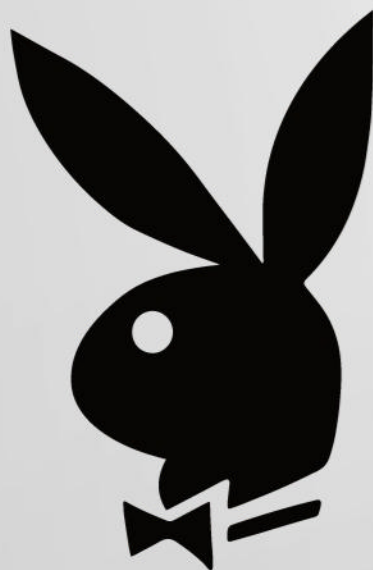
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PLAYBOY



UP *in* SMOKE

Playing a stoner sent these actors' careers sky-high

BY **STEPHEN REBELLO**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ORION/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK**



Join us as we revisit some of the most memorable movie stunts from influential actors pretending to be under the influence.



Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider*: a boozy ACLU lawyer and perpetual screwup who hits the road with motorcycling hippie freaks Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper. Drugs of choice: Jim Beam and, later, grass, which was actually toked on camera. *Why the buzz*: Nicholson gave a career-making performance in this 1969 counterculture smash. *Downer*: He didn't win the best supporting actor Oscar that year.

Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson on the roll in *Easy Rider*. Columbia/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Sean Penn in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*: high school surfer dude and moron supreme Jeff Spicoli. Drugs of choice: buds, ludes. *Why the buzz*: Whether facing off with uptight history teacher Mr. Hand or nonchalantly ordering pizza during class, Penn makes Spicoli an icon by hitting every situation and line way out of the park. *Downer*: We'll pay good money to anyone who can find Penn's sense of humor today.

Sean Penn (center) plays stoner Jeff Spicoli—he puts the *high* in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Universal/Kobal/Shutterstock

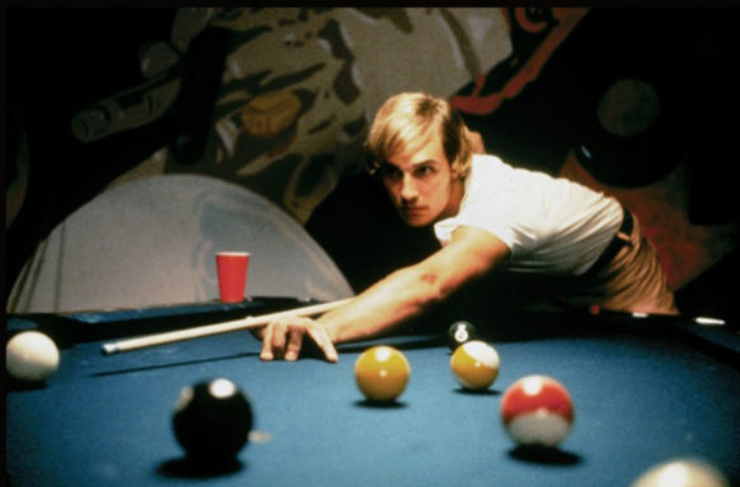


Keanu Reeves in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*: the likably lunkheaded high school senior and heavy-metal band member who time-trips through ancient history along with his best bud to ace an exam. *Drug of choice*: Ted's most excellent obliviousness. *Why the buzz*: Reeves has never been funnier, especially when displaying his iffy grasp of history. *Downer*: A sequel and animated TV version ran this franchise into the ground.

George Carlin, Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves in the first *Bill and Ted's* film. (Orion/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Dave Chappelle in *Half-Baked*: hilarious double duty as Thurgood Jensen, a janitor at a drug lab, and pothead rapper and pimp daddy Sir Smoke-a-Lot. *Drug of choice*: Weed. Duh. *Why the buzz*: Whether trying to con his squeaky-clean girlfriend Mary Jane (get it?) or confessing that pot has made him impotent, Chappelle is hilarious. *Downer*: Where's Dave now when we need him?

The character played by Dave Chapelle (center) is fully relatable in *Half-Baked*. (Michael Gibson/Universal/Kobal/Shutterstock)



Matthew McConaughey in *Dazed and Confused*: a swaggering, muscle-car-driving sex machine too cool (and too old) for the high school crowd he hangs with. *Drugs of choice*: grass, beer. *Why the buzz*: McConaughey supplies so many of the yuks and so much of the pathos in this soulfully hilarious classic that it's no wonder the performance made his career. *Downer*: McConaughey hasn't scored this great a role since.

All right, all right, all right: Matthew McConaughey in *Dazed and Confused*. (Universal/Gramercy/Kobal/Shutterstock)



Mike Myers in *Wayne's World*: the headbanging nimrod who broadcasts his own public-access TV show from his parents' basement with loser friend Garth (Dana Carvey). *Drug of choice*: Unspecified, but it's all in the subtext. *Why the buzz*: Myers and Carvey parlayed their Saturday Night Live chemistry into big-screen success, becoming 1990s grunge icons. *Downer*: The lame *Wayne's World 2* is not worthy.

Party on, excellent! Mike Myers and Dana Carvey in *Wayne's World*. (Paramount/Kobal/Shutterstock)



WEED WARRIOR: GOOD TRAINING SURVIVING ALONE

Self-isolation? Coping with anxiety? Turns out that surviving loneliness has some parallels with navigating illicit drug sales

BY **ANDREW DEANGELO**

ILLUSTRATION BY **ROB STITES**



**It was just me,
the cash, a couple
books, a pad of
paper, a pen, an
ounce of weed and
a jar of Vaseline.**

In the middle of the dusty Arizona desert somewhere near Mexico, I was stuck in a dank motel room. It was the mid-1990s, and I was waiting on a large load of weed from across the border. My job was to inspect the cannabis, provide the down payment upon approval and organize the logistics with the drivers for transportation. My constant companion in this underground enterprise: about \$75,000, stashed in a black Samsonite hard-case rollie with a built-in lock. It was enough money for the down payment but not so much that I wanted to pay a courier to babysit it. My Mexican contacts told me the delivery was imminent and that I would be in and out quickly. I believed them. I needed the weed.

It was the time of year in Tucson when college students were going back to school. All the hotels were booked, and I was forced to stay out in the border towns where I had to inspect the load. This convergence of events made me feel uneasy. I couldn't leave my room. I was afraid of being seen. I was short on supplies. It felt like something very bad could be lurking just around the corner, and all I could do was wait.

And wait.

And wait.

In those days it could take a long time for product to be safely delivered. In this case, it took about five weeks. What I had no way of knowing at that time was just how many pandemic survival skills I would learn over the course of that tense motel stay.

I was young, and it was before the internet, before cell phones. I left the relative safety of the motel only rarely, and only for the most essential supplies. There was one fast food restaurant and one gas station/convenience store in the entire town. A few times I drove to another town to load up on food, drink and softcore porno magazines. I needed some entertainment, and the motel had no cable television. It did have a pay phone, which I used on the regular. Other than that it was just me, the cash, a couple books, a pad of paper, a pen, an ounce of weed and a jar of Vaseline.

That was it. For weeks, I had to sit there and babysit a pile of cash and do my best to avoid everyone.

I had to learn to manage a certain amount of stress as I was engaged in criminal activity. Meditation became an essential tool of the trade, as did push-ups and sit-ups. Copious cannabis consumption was a constant, followed by a mix of soothing euphoria and utter paranoia. Whenever I ventured out, I felt a deep sense of fear. Every person seemed like an undercover cop or a federal agent—my mind raced to think of every contingency, every possible outcome and every escape route.

In the situation I had placed myself in, I had planned redundancies to infinity and beyond. Most of these were just in my head. The truth was that I was stuck and vulnerable. I had to live with very little over an extended period of time in the same location. I was in unfamiliar surroundings. It was hot. There was no air conditioning. I ate the food that was available. And I tried not to drive myself insane. I spent my time managing

my paranoia and fear, reading and writing, watching network television, and wondering why the hell I was in the weed business in the first place. *There must be something else I can do to make a living.*

As it turns out, there wasn't. I still sell weed for a living. But I get to do it legally now, which is a big relief.

If I survive the coronavirus pandemic, I will look back at cannabis prohibition as something I could control and even trust. It may not have been a picnic, but you can predict cops' behavior much easier than you can predict the behavior of a virus.

Nevertheless, as I sit here in self-quarantine, I am grateful for the survival skills I learned while stranded in the desert for five weeks waiting on a load of weed. I never thought they would come in handy, but I can sit here for a long time without losing my shit, and right now that matters. I have no regrets.

**If I survive the
coronavirus
pandemic, I will
look back at can-
nabis prohibition
as something I
could control and
even trust.**



PLAYMATE

Sara Blake

Instagram @onlysarablake | @blakemoonshine



Photography by **Matt Cheek**









How do you like to begin your day? Wake up to pure chaos every morning, getting my kids ready for school, arguing to brush hair, making sure everyone's brushed their teeth, and once the kids are on their way to school I hurry to get my ass kicked at the gym.

What's the most exciting hobby or interest you've pursued recently, and how did you get into it? I recently started boxing. It is the most intense workout I've ever done and I can't get enough of it. I have the best boxing trainer in Sarasota Florida at uppercut fitness.

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would your ideal day look like? I absolutely must have a workout, but after that, the most perfect day would be at the beach. I love the sand and water. And I hate wearing clothes, it's the most acceptable way I can be naked but still wear something socially acceptable.

What's a project or goal you're currently working on that you're really excited about? My body is my current goal. I'm working out harder than I ever have. I am seeing my abs get ripped and it's become a total addiction. I love a challenge.

What's the most memorable date you've ever been on, and what made it stand out? The most memorable date I've been on was the first date with my husband. We went to a football game, I was wearing a hot pink bra with a white tank top, and it was so hot that I left him in the stadium to drink in the parking lot. On the way home he grabbed my boob, and we've been married for 12 years now.

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner? What do you value the most? A guy has to be funny and have big arms. I love the feeling like

I'm wrapped up in my man's arms. I also like looking at his arms when he's on top if you get what I mean ;) I value good conversation and stability. I'm such a gypsy soul I need my man to keep me grounded at times.

Who has been your biggest inspiration or role model in your personal or professional life? I feel like my role model or inspiration changes at different phases in my life. Right now, my friend Alex has been such an inspiration in being a hustler and learning to love life exactly as it is while making good financial decisions. In my professional life, definitely has always been Michael Jordan. I want to be the absolute best at everything I do and I'm super competitive.

What do you enjoy most about your hobbies or interests outside of work? If you love money, you learn to make everything about work. But I love going to dinner and having really good drinks with the people I love.

How do you find a balance between your personal life and your career? The secret to finding balance in working and life is investments or real estate. Find a way to make your money make more money for you and you'll be able to live a life you enjoy with balance.

How do you stay motivated and overcome challenges in your work? Being a model is super competitive, so if you want to be the best there are no bad days.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? The best way to keep up with me is on Twitter at Saracheeky You can also find me on Onlyfans at saracheeky. I'm on every social media platform including IG at on-lysarablake or Thesarablake. My website is Onlysarablake.com.







Escorts *Need Love* Too

**The Story Behind
Our Story**

How do escorts find love? We spoke with a writer who spent more than a year answering that question

WRITTEN BY
HELEN SIBILA





Being single can suck, but finding someone worth dating isn't easy either. Now imagine what it's like for "providers"—sex workers who are paid for their companionship and physical intimacy—who want to find that someone special. Do you tell a potential boyfriend that you sleep with others for a living? If so, how do you tell them? And when? And how do you find them in the first place? Those added layers of difficulty are the focus of journalist Tim Struby's new *Playboy* feature article, "How Does an Escort Find a Boyfriend? Hint: It's Not Easy."

Struby, a New York City-based writer whose work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *ESPN the Magazine* and *New York*, to name just a few, is no stranger to subcultures. His reporting and research often span multiple years—"I've done stories that take a month to a year to four years," he says—in which he immerses himself in various underground communities, including South Africa's illegal street racing scene and the East Coast's mafia-

connected boxing crowd.

For this particular feature, Struby spent more than a year conducting in-depth interviews with high-end escorts about their attempts at starting and sustaining long-term romantic relationships while pursuing an often stigmatized career. We wanted to know more, so we spoke to Struby about what it was like to get to know these women, what the process taught him and whether dating can ever be a walk in the proverbial park.

PLAYBOY: I'm curious about how you came up with the concept for your article.

TIM STRUBY: About five years ago a friend of mine, photographer Lynsey Addario, reached out about a multimedia project she was working on for an organization called Project&. They wanted to honor the 40-year anniversary of *Working*, a book by Studs Terkel about the everyday lives of working people, by talking to people from all walks of life and putting together interviews and photos of

them. I had a friend who was connected with an escort, and I thought that would be an interesting perspective to include, so I had her introduce me.

When I interviewed this woman she mentioned that she had a long-term boyfriend, and later another escort told me she was married. I had never thought that was possible or even considered that reality before. How do escorts

"Can you share your partner? Are you comfortable with that? You don't know until you actually experience it."

have a boyfriend or a husband? That comment stuck with me for a long time.

PLAYBOY: How did you go from thinking about that comment to writing a nearly 5,000-word feature?

STRUBY: When I look for stories, I look for something that confounds me or makes me curious. Two years later, I decided to call up one of those escorts and see if she would be interested in talking with me, in depth, about her love life. She said she would be on board. I ended up going on Twitter and finding other escorts in the New York area to interview. I reached out to about 40 different escorts, ranging from 23 to 47 years old, and heard back from maybe 10 of them.

I met up with them and explained that my article would focus specifically on their personal life and that the process would go on for at least a year—so that it would be nuanced and truthful, not sensationalized. It was a subject that a lot of them wanted to talk about but never had a venue to talk about it.

I ended up with three main subjects who were in different stages of dating—one had a long-term boyfriend, one was dating more casually and the other was just starting to navigate dates.

PLAYBOY: Did you get the sense that providing a new outlet outside their friends, therapists and fellow escorts was beneficial for them?

STRUBY: Without question. It was validating for them in a sense. Therapy is one thing, but to be in the public eye and to put this out there is another. It freed them in a way, I think.

For other sex workers who are basically celebrities, the job has its difficulties, but at least they can be open about who they are. The women I interviewed live this double life; they're proud of what they do, but they can't showcase what they do. I think that's really hard on them.

PLAYBOY: You ended up working on this project for a year and a half. I imagine many stories you heard didn't make it into the article. Did you talk to male providers or other types of sex workers like porn stars or cam girls?

STRUBY: I didn't cover the entire scope of sex workers, because there is just such a wide range of work to cover. It would have become a book at that point.

When this story started, I had reached out to providers from different backgrounds, including race. There were a lot of similarities in experiences for the women, but I did notice in talking to Bre, a black provider, that she had a different take as a woman of color. I wish we

had more room in the piece to talk about that aspect of her experience, but we decided to focus on their experiences dating rather than their actual work.

There aren't as many male providers as there are female providers, but I talked to one very popular provider early on in the process and I quickly realized that male escorts don't face the same stigmas or stereotypes as female escorts. His interview was just so banal. When I talked to these women, I could tell they deal with a different beast when it comes to their dating life. It is quite possible that the men weren't being as forthcoming with me, but overall it just seemed like their ego was built up from their work. All the women I talked to were proud of their work, but they also dealt with insecurities and issues and they were very open about talking about them. So I decided to focus on just women escorts, because I wanted to give them the most voice and the most human story.

PLAYBOY: I was surprised at how some of the women's partners were accepting of their work at first, but their relationships didn't work out in the end.

STRUBY: I was surprised by the same thing. You think, "Oh, you don't want someone fucking your girlfriend. Fair enough." But often it was less about them having sex with other people and more about time and money. That's where it gets complicated. These women make so much money, and that can be de-meaning for some men. And they sometimes have to be gone for a weekend or week at a time, and they can't communicate with their partner while they're working.

PLAYBOY: Did you have any preconceived ideas about this industry?

STRUBY: I came in with the idea that these women do it for a good time, but I honestly don't think it's all that different from being a banker or a lawyer. Their interior lives are very normal; I think a lot of readers will be surprised by that. I watched *The Girlfriend Experience* on Starz, and I felt disconnected from that cold aesthetic Steven Soderbergh created. It was missing all the humor that comes with this work. All the providers I've ever met and interviewed are so funny, smart and likable.

I have always had a soft spot for strippers and escorts because I find that they are usually more self-aware than most people. I like people who are comfortable with themselves regardless of how the mainstream views them. As a writer, I've talked to a lot of people, and I can honestly say I have never met more fully formed and more in-tune people than the

women I talked to for this story. They came to terms with their own contradictions without hesitation. All the women I spoke to are super feminist, but they also see the contradictions in their double life. I learned an immense amount from them.

PLAYBOY: Has your own love life benefited from this experience?

STRUBY: I don't know if I have. Do I have a new perception about sex work? Yes. This has definitely helped me understand dating more than any dating app I've ever been on. But does it help with my single dating life? Not really.

PLAYBOY: Would you date an escort?

STRUBY: I don't think I could. I just think it would be very difficult. How would you feel if you went on a date with someone, and on the second date they said they were an escort? Sometimes the providers would ask me that question, and I couldn't really say yes or no. It's one of those things you just do not know until you're there. Can you share your partner? Are you comfortable with that? You don't know until you actually experience it.

PLAYBOY: Our *Playboy Plus* stars, many of whom are adult actors, always tell me the funniest stories. What were some that you heard from the women you talked to?

STRUBY: One escort had an older client, around 80 years old, who didn't want to have sex. All he wanted her to do was to come to his apartment with a fake gun and pretend to shoot him. He would use fake blood and then just jerk off to it.

The beauty of what they do is that it can be as weird and funny as that, but it can also be as mundane as a nine-to-five job. Like right now for your job, you have to sit with me for an hour and listen to me ramble on. They have to do that too. One woman would drive on the Pacific Coast Highway with a client, and he would play the same music every single time. She was like, "I'm going to kill myself."

PLAYBOY: Most of your interviews happened before the pandemic. How has it impacted the providers' work?

STRUBY: Because of coronavirus, their work has been shut down. However, a lot of them don't rely on this as their sole source of income; a lot of them are in school or are doing something else. But some are getting out of the business, and some are struggling with their identity because of it. It's hard to make that much money and be empowered and then say, "You know what, I'm walking out of here." In a way, it's almost like they are professional athletes with a shelf life. You can only play ball that well for so long.

finding enlightenment in the dark ...



BDSM

finding enlightenment in the dark ...

BY IAN KIRKE



According to Ian Dury in his 1977 hit, co-written with Chaz Jankel, 'Sex and drugs and rock and roll is all my brain and body need. Sex and drugs and rock and roll are very good indeed'. If I were being picky, I would add good food, some cash in my skyrocket and a nice place to live too, but I acknowledge with such attention to detail I would be a crap songwriter. In terms of the sex element, I lost my virginity at nineteen, a relatively slow starter by contemporary standards, and as I recall the earth didn't move for either of us. I made up for the slow start and think I am fairly good at it, although to be honest I have never met another male who had a contrary view. Between you and I, not to be echoed to anyone else, I think my prowess is best summed up by Woody Allen's sage words: "I'm such a good lover because I practise a lot on my own."

I am inherently lazy and crave comfort in most personal endeavours. Although I have done some risky things in my life my level of kink has nonetheless remained consistent: just above switching the light on. I also don't do pain. Getting into the pool in Tenerife for the first time is usually accompanied by a few howls of anguish. If anyone were tempted to twist my nipples, they would probably follow this up with searching for their teeth on the bedroom carpet. Other than food, drink, and certain medical procedures my orifices aren't for entering, and if any foreign object looms in the vicinity of my posterior my fight or flight response is highly attuned for defensive action. Overall, I would rank my sexual appetite as vanilla with a little sauce of which the latter is totally within my own defined pouring parameters. With this testosterone charged testimonial it was inevitable that my journalistic skills would eventually be challenged by the goading of others who smirk at the sexual exploits of a close pal of Pee-wee Herman and Noddy. So, with my stout boots on, sensible under garments and vest, ensuring that I never left any vents unguarded I turned my investigative skills to the great sexual unknown: BDSM.

Of course I had heard of BDSM, mainly through inane banter with other male friends and had built up a mental image of gas masks, spanking, chains and being led around the lounge on a dog collar. How reliable this perception was would ultimately be put to the test. I must admit to being a tad

confused too, especially since my mum's neighbour Dorothy had expressed heartfelt appreciation of the novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James, an accomplished author who in my humble opinion looked more like a librarian than a dominatrix. Dot was also in her seventies and liked knitting and jigsaw puzzles. Wrapped around this disorientation was evidence, if one can say that of mainstream media, that BDSM had seen a resurgence during the COVID-19 pandemic. I must admit to having altered my domestic habits somewhat during the successive lockdowns, although I doubted if binge watching Netflix in my dressing gown and not showering until late afternoon qualified as kink.

With the help of a bunch of charming, trusting, and bubbly BDSM'ers drawn from the connections that form the social media highway of human cyber relations I drew up my list of research questions and listened. Without their collaboration, openness, and sincerity this piece would have lacked any veracity or humanity. Creating some form of instruction manual was never my intention, as quite frankly, I lacked any professional or anecdotal experience.

What is BDSM?

A good place to start since I didn't know, without a Google search, what the acronym stood for. Indeed, I wasn't the only one as it had a variety of definitions.

B - Bondage, D - Discipline/Domination, S - Submission/Sadism (feeling pleasure/sexual excitement by inflicting pain), M - Masochism (feeling pleasure/sexual excitement receiving pain).

Although Mistress Kiba qualified the textbook status by adding, "It generally boils down to a mutually agreed upon power exchange. This can look vastly different in each dynamic and there is not a single 'correct' way of being involved in BDSM. Some people keep BDSM to sex, some live 'the lifestyle' 24/7."

Thinking that I had grasped the parameters I was thrown into confusion when Tracy entered the room and proudly exclaimed, "It really does cover everything from balloon fetishes to ultraviolence." Sam added somewhat rationally, "It's an umbrella term for those practicing kink." Kitchenalia could be kinky too! As I ate my porridge the next morning, spoon in hand my mind wandered ...



Does it hurt?

Sam commenced with a reassuring salvo. “Not all acts will involve physical pain.

For instance, I get off on humiliation and the psychological.” Now I could do that, having years of experience barracking my own players at Notts County! But then again, I don’t think this qualified as BDSM as Miriam upped the tempo, “It can hurt, but there’s consent and boundaries within each interaction and relationship. Pain play can come into it if that’s your thing, but there’s so much more than discomfort involved with BDSM. It definitely shouldn’t hurt emotionally.”

Mistress Kiba broadened the enquiry with a degree of welcome theory. “A dominant/submissive dynamic can have no pain element to it at all. As a dominatrix, I have many clients that I purely dominate online. They may have tasks to complete, rules to abide by, acts of servitude that they get enjoyment out of without even having to be in the same place. It is a myth that all dominants are sadists and all submissives are masochists. If you want it to hurt it can hurt a lot, if you don’t want it to it doesn’t have to.”

I was beginning to realise that BDSM was not a narrow pursuit. This continuum was elegantly summed up by Debbie who said, “Saying I’m into BDSM is like saying I like food. There are so many branches of the community and probably something even the most vanilla person would be curious about.”

What was your BDSM journey?

Sam was relatively new to the scene and up until recently had been standing with me in the ‘nothing to declare’ aisle. “My BDSM journey is a relatively new one. My vanilla relationship had broken down and I had always felt there was something missing. I got to meet a dom in December 2019, after several weeks of online chatting. He planned and discussed every detail from start to finish, what to wear, what to expect, how I would be expected to address him and so on.”

Although more experienced, Debbie’s gateway to kink had similarities despite her progression being from higher ground. “At 25 I started organising my own private orgies. I was fortunate to find a man who had several trusted friends. I met a businessman in a hotel who ended up using his fist, but not to bang on the table if you know what I mean! This had rather pleasurable results. I liked being controlled.”

Miriam added to the narrative and initially I wondered if she knew Dorothy. “I was acutely aware of its existence thanks to that awful set of novels called Fifty Shades of Grey. I read half of the first book and never picked it back up again. As a newly single 19-year-old, I wanted to stretch my legs - I mean wings! - and signed up for an online dating profile. I came across an older man and we matched, started messaging and eventually swapped numbers and hooked up.

We swapped porn videos and explicit messages. Then he took me to a market called the BBB (Birmingham Bizarre Bazaar) where he introduced me to the social side of BDSM.”

Mistress Kiba chimed a more cautious tone as she reflected on

her voyage of discovery. “I was 18 and was introduced in an unsafe way by people who were taking advantage of my naivety. It seemed fine at the time but now I look back and cringe which is why it’s important to wait to get involved when you’re a little older and you have people you can trust to guide you.”

Tracy added, “I came across it via the internet, realised I was into some of it, and went to one of the big fetish markets to investigate further. I started attending events about eight years ago, and that’s really when my social circle grew, and my understanding of different fetishes and the etiquette and expectations of the scene developed. For people looking at getting involved, I’d suggest starting with online social sites to understand more about your kinks. Munches are a good starting point, post COVID restrictions, which are social, non-play events held in vanilla venues, such as pubs or coffee shops.”

This all seemed very cordial and, dare I say, British although I couldn’t help wondering if falling down the rabbit hole into Wonderland could have some disadvantages, especially in terms of monogamous relationships? Miriam picked up my vibes and sought to manage the opening of Pandora’s box in a more practical manner. “For me, BDSM and romantic relationships go hand in hand. I would struggle to have a monogamous romantic relationship without any BDSM based activity. I naturally lean towards polyamory because I feel as humans, we have a complex set of needs in romance, sexual and platonic ways so confining that to just one person feels inherently unfair. I like





Wensleydale cheese as much as I like Cheddar, right? Similar concept with sex and BDSM.”

Is it for everyone?

Everyone in the house agreed. BDSM isn't for everyone. None of them metaphorically pushed it down my throat either. Miriam qualified the sentiment by adding, “There's probably something that falls under the umbrella of BDSM that a lot of people will like. Anal sex used to be considered particularly out there and kinky, but it's quite normalised now.”

Mistress Kiba reinforced the variety of kink to choose from when she reminded us all of the joy of dressing up. “Getting dressed up as a schoolgirl/boy and having your 'teacher' tell you off is a form of submission.” At this point I had a flashback to Mr Piper, my stern mathematics teacher at secondary school. Tracy broke this unhealthy chain of thought when she turned the focus onto fantasy pursuits. “It's not just about wearing latex and leather and being whipped in a dingy club. It could be role play during sex; it could be your long-distance partner telling you exactly what to do when you masturbate on video chat. I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about what BDSM is which is why people think that it isn't for them.”

Debbie couldn't hide her craving for the kink. “Impact play is a huge part for me. I love being spanked and caned. I also adore the degradation and humiliation side although only for Sir at his request.” Bugger! I was back in front of Mr Piper and couldn't remember what a half times a half actually equated to. Time to move on!

What are the myths and legends?

Debbie was quick to pop the balloon (which I now know I can use for more than just celebrating a birthday) that most of my associates had dreamt up about BDSM. “I guess myths and legends would be images of whips, chains and dungeons. They can be introduced but this would not be a fair representation.”

Miriam sighed at the numerous fables. “The one that springs to mind first is about submissives. They're all meek, shy nerds. Absolutely not the case! I've met submissives who just look like regular people: doctors, nurses, factory workers, shop assistants, mechanics, etc. Your barista at the coffee shop might be a nighttime deviant. Another common misconception is that people into BDSM can't have normal sex, and that it has to get weird and kinky. This is absolutely not true! I've had some really fulfilling, satisfying sex as just two people getting it on.”

Mistress Kiba continued to dispel the myths that I was increasingly minded to conclude were being perpetuated by those who knew absolutely nothing about the case in hand (or umbrella, you choose!). We vanillas were holding the smoking gun. “I have clients from all walks of life. Since my time is valuable, I deal with a lot of people who earn a fair amount of money. That respectable CEO business person may be grovelling at my feet after their meeting. There is no one 'type' who are into BDSM. Not everyone in the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex plus) community are into BDSM either.”

What role do you best represent?

Sam kicked off with an entry level synopsis. “Roles involved in-

clude dom, master/mistress, sub, slave, rope bunny and switch.” The need for clarification on these alien terms was forthcoming when it was explained that you can switch from rigger (one who ties) to bunny (the one being tied). She added, “I mostly identify as a brat, a type of sub who enjoys punishment and will play with their dom to even encourage discipline.” Debbie nodded enthusiastically in a distinctly impish manner.

Miriam laid her cards on the table, “I will take charge in a group situation to help control someone else on request of a dominant person. Generally, this is referred to as a 'service top', but my preference is to be the submissive, bottom of the food chain if you will.” This sudden mention of food made me hungry although I was beginning to wonder if vanilla ice cream would be adequate.

New terminologies, that got me clicking on Google, were introduced by Mistress Kiba. “I am a cis (individuals who identify with the gender that was assigned to them at birth, not being transgender) femme dominant. I am a sadist but that is reserved for my masochistic subs and I get my kicks from medical play.” Tracy continued the penchant for all things related to doctors and nurses although she also expressed a keenness for extreme spanking by virtue of an array of instruments.

What is the best part?

There was a mutual recognition of the care, compassion, and honesty that my BDSM'ers had encountered. This came as something of a surprise, as some of the roles, excluding the balloon play that even I could engage with, static aside, appeared to contradict this assertion. But that's where I almost certainly had it all wrong. Miriam captured the mood by declaring, “For me, it's feeling cared about. Knowing that you have someone who you can talk to about anything and everything and stuff you didn't even think about until it comes up. You are someone.”

Any disadvantages?

Debbie, I am sure, knew Dorothy as she immediately, and thankfully, rejected anyone who had read the *Fifty Shades of Grey* series or seen the films. Tracy was a little more forgiving of my mums near neighbour. “I won't dismiss the 'Fifty Shades' effect as wholly detrimental because I do think it opened doors to people who might not have been brave enough to open them, but I do think it's become a lot more judgemental as people who are less experienced or less knowledgeable come onto the scene. Also, I hate to break it to you but I've yet to meet a billionaire dom with his own private jet. Maybe it's just the company I keep, but they don't seem to be in large supply.”

Sam pointed out the risks of inexperience and choosing the wrong partner. “Always be clear what your hard and soft limits are. And if they say there'll be no safe word then that's an immediate red flag!” Mistress Kiba added to this caution. “Everything has its disadvantages but that's where the community really come into play. There are plenty of people who claim they have experience who haven't which can get people hurt. The community are great for education and protection though. We all understand that we didn't get into BDSM knowing everything, we don't look down on anyone for knowing less about something. If you want to learn, just ask.”

According to Miriam certain roles have drawbacks too. “Be



ing a submissive takes an awful lot of trust, and because of how much trust you need to give it's extremely easy to get hurt."

Mainstream media suggests that there has been a spike in BDSM during COVID. What are your thoughts?

Tracy couldn't hide her excitement. "I think it's brilliant! People are having a go, exploring, and learning." Then added the 'but' (not to be confused with bottom play), "Just make sure that you're doing it safely. Things like breath play and even restraints can have catastrophic effects if they go wrong. I know someone who nearly lost a finger because of a rope tie that was too tight for too long."

Others recognised that successive lockdowns had increased the notion of 'spicing things up' in the boudoir. Mistress Kiba, ever the pragmatist, pointed out, "There are tons of resources online including online classes in just about everything that will help guide you in healthy BDSM practice. FetLife (BDSM-focused social networking website) is a great place to go for information and to learn about classes and talk to like-minded people."

Miriam likened the apparent surge to other natural cravings. "Imagine eating the identical meal prepared in the exact same way, every single day. You'll get bored after a week, won't you? Same thing for sex and I also think that this might be separate from Covid-19, as women are discovering their sexuality and ability to be sexual and enjoy their own bodies as well as exploring their partners."

They've realised there's more to sex than just penis in vagina." As I was digesting this nugget she followed up with a contemporary quip. "Even the best suited of partners get bored of talking about their workdays and zoom quizzes." She was right. Zoom quizzes were now beginning to suck, although was this a dom or sub trait?

For all the other vanillas out there, is there anything else we need to know?

As a vanilla with honours the reassurance of a simple code of ethics

provided by Sam was more than helpful. "The golden rule: safe, sane and consensual. And enjoy it, hang up the guilt and have fun." Tracy added the useful tip of agreeing a 'safe word' or better still utilising the traffic light system: Green, good to go, amber, slow down and red, stop right there!

Debbie likewise offered a reassuring hand of guidance, open palmed rather than clenched in a fist. "If you are considering it don't just jump in. Do your research. Take time to ensure that partners are fully consenting and comfortable with all situations."

The fun element was vocalised by Miriam who added with a broad smile, "Have fun! Genuinely, BDSM and kink and anything non-vanilla is meant to be fun. Even if that includes pain. Also, things won't necessarily go right the first-time round and if they don't, try again in a week. Lastly, try everything at least twice. You might have just got your technique wrong initially." I started this journey with several preconceived ideas about BDSM and readily admit that I was comprehensively wrong! I met a bunch of people who were happy with their sexuality and were able to express to others, including old vanilla me, their emotions in a manner that was truly remarkable. My own sexual roadmap had been heavily suppressed by a narrative of Monty pythonesque 'nudge, nudge, wink, wink, say no more' reflections. Vanilla is just as good as kink, but ignorance is never a substitute for knowledge. If I have signposted you to more sunnier uplands, or reassured you that where you are, for the time being, is exactly right then our time together has been worth the effort. But time for me to depart dear reader as Dorothy has her balloons out, and has been shaking her fist at me since I am late. Ooh err missus!

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Playboy Interview Kanye West

A candid conversation with the record of the year contender about his Katrina controversy, hip-hop homophobia and his addictions to porn and sex

INTERVIEW BY **ROB TANNENBAUM**

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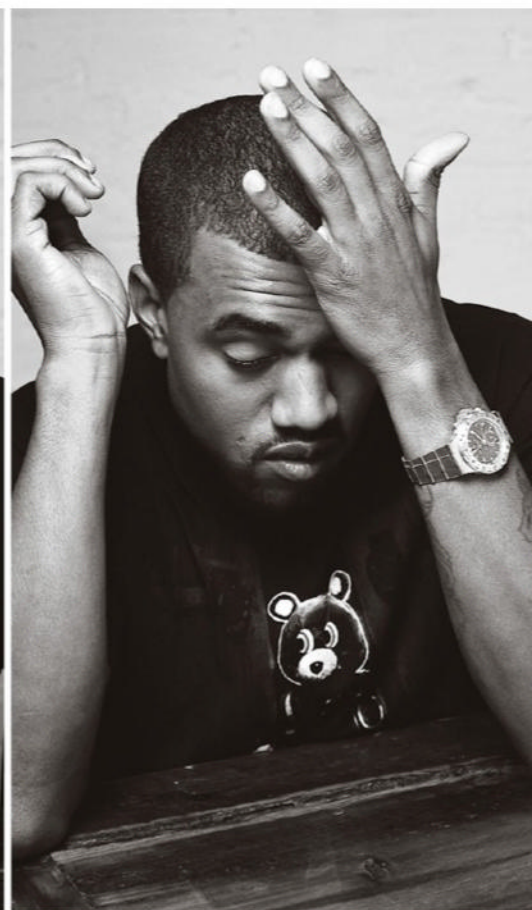
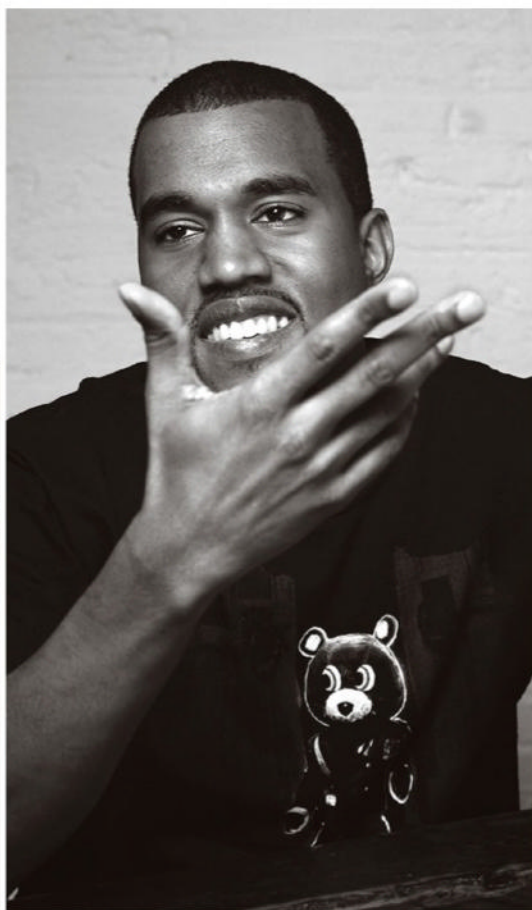
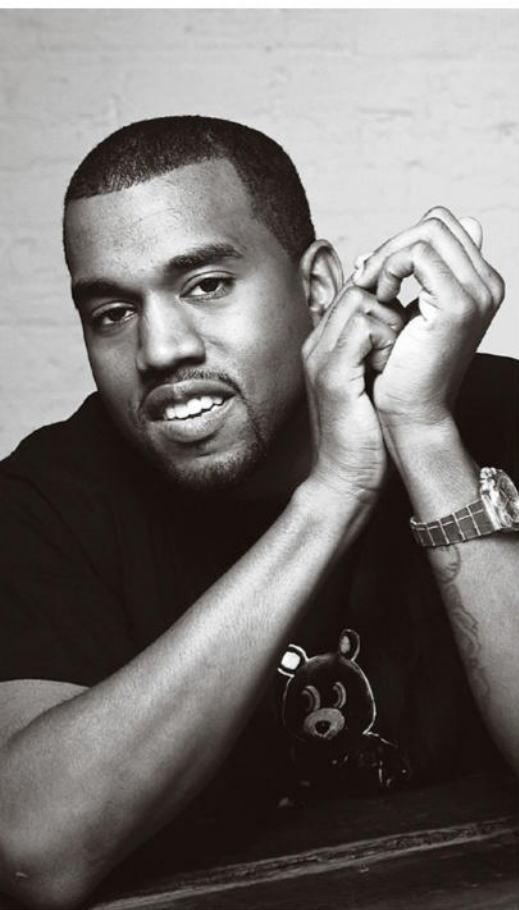
"White people, this is your only chance to use the word p'nigger," Kanye West shouts to the Theater at Madison Square Garden crowd roaring the words to p"Gold Digger," the biggest rap hit of the past year. "Take advantage of it."

That snapshot from West's recent tour sums up the wit and audacity of the 28-year-old rapper and producer. The chorus of the song p"I ain't saying she a gold digger/

But she ain't messing with no broke niggers"—is not only as catchy as bird flu, it's also a provocative comment about money, race and sex. A one-man smash factory who has produced songs for Alicia Keys, Mariah Carey, Janet Jackson, Ludacris, Talib Kweli, John Legend, Common, Cam'ron and Jay-Z, West doesn't back down from any topic—or from the spotlight.

Last September, during NBC's live

broadcast of a benefit concert for Hurricane Katrina victims, West burst the apolitical cue-card solemnity, denouncing the media for referring to black New Orleanians as looters and alleging that the government had been slow to respond, because those in need were mostly black. His digression was full of pauses and incomplete sentences, and co-presenter Mike Myers stood by in silent panic. After Myers interjected a few



lines from the Teleprompter, West distilled his argument to its pith: p“George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” NBC instantly cut away and excised the dangerous moment from a rebroadcast later that night on the West Coast, but the clip was kept alive on the internet, where bloggers called West everything from a racist to a hero to a self-promoting profiteer.

His name, pronounced KAHN-yay, means p“the only one” in Swahili, and he’s the lone child of Donda West, who recently retired as chair of the English department at Chicago State University, and Ray West, a photographer and former Black Panther who is now a Christian counselor. When Kanye was three, his parents split up. He was raised primarily by his doting mother, and his father has said, Kanye a“displayed his charisma even in day care.”

He first wrote rhymes in third grade and four years later began to make beats, the produced tracks rappers rhyme over. He won an art scholarship but dropped out of college, lived at home and continued to struggle until 2001, the year of his personal tipping point: Jay-Z picked five West tracks for his CD *The Blueprint*, including m“Izzo (H.O.V.A.),” which used a Jackson 5 sample to (over)popularize the phrase “fo’ shizzle my nizzle.”

West’s beats were vivid and brassy, and he helped even the dullest rappers get on the radio. But when he told Jay-Z and other decision makers at Roc-A-Fella Records that he wanted to rap, they snickered with reverse class snobbery. West came from a comfortable background and had no firsthand knowledge of drug dealing or weaponry; he was cute, wore pastel polo shirts with the collars turned up and couldn’t have been more the opposite of 50 Cent, rap’s biggest star of the past few years.

The record label finally relented, and West began to work with his customary industriousness. Driving from a studio one night in October 2002, he fell asleep and crashed his car, fracturing his jaw. With his mouth still wired shut, he recorded p“Through the Wire,” one of four hit singles on his first CD, *The College Dropout*. They are songs of celebration and mourning, with comedy as the lone constant; in m“Slow Jamz” he talks about using old soul records to seduce women and drops a great joke at Michael Jackson’s expense. But the album has as many wise cracks as wisecracks. In “Jesus Walks,” West confesses both his sins and his devotion to Jesus, and “All Falls Down” traces young blacks’ appetites for expensive sneakers and gold-heavy watches to insecurity: “We all self-conscious/I’m just the first to admit it.” As it turned out, there was a big market for a rapper who’d never sold drugs. The best-reviewed album of 2004, *The College Dropout* sold 3 million copies and earned 10 Grammy nominations. The world suddenly gave West as much adulation as he said he deserved.

For *Late Registration*, released in August 2005, West added a co-producer, Jon Brion, a white Angeleno best known for working with Fiona Apple. No other rapper would have risked such an audacious move, and it paid off with even more raves. m“There’s never been hip-hop so complex and subtle musically,” wrote *The Village Voice*, while *The New Yorker* claimed the album m“encompasses decades of African American music.” *Late Registration* broke West fully into the mainstream—from the cover of *Time* magazine to a place among Barbara Walters’s 10 Most Fascinating People of 2005.

While West was on tour, PLAYBOY sent writer Rob Tannenbaum to interview him; the two began their discussion backstage at a De Kalb, Illinois concert hall, then continued it later at a Manhattan studio. Tannenbaum reports, g“West’s mind leaps around unpredictably, so in the course of our conversations he told me about the suede jacket he was wearing (‘It’s Yves Saint Laurent’), the music video he was editing with animator Bill Plympton and his 2,700-square-foot loft in SoHo, which has a 16-foot walk-in closet and a 12-foot bathroom sink.

”He says some pretty outrageous things, usually about how great he is, but it’s a welcome antidote to the false modesty most stars put across. And it’s clear he subscribes to the playful theory of Muhammad Ali: ‘It’s not bragging if you can back it up.’

”But it’s also clear how seriously he takes his work. ‘I really study rap,’ he said, and he can keenly analyze changing trends in the arcane field of rhyming couplets. And he played at shatteringly high volume a new beat he’d written for Jay-Z, a simple, monstrous thing with a resounding cymbal. ‘That beat is killing,’ he said. ‘Just think of that with Jay on it.’ Along the way, he announced he had lured Jay-Z out of retirement. And no wonder: West really is that great. Just ask him.”

PLAYBOY: Let’s start with the seven words that made national headlines: g“George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” Had you planned on saying that, or was it an ad-lib?

WEST: I’ve never been asked this question before, but I totally didn’t plan to say it. I planned the bullet points about the media portraying black people as looters and how it took the government so long to go down there to help. Bad news is great news, and I felt like CNN, NBC and all these stations were capitalizing on the tragedy.

PLAYBOY: Describe what led to your making that statement.

WEST: Tim McGraw did a song, and it was really emotional, showing all the imagery from New Orleans. When I went up to read the Teleprompter, I just thought what was on it wasn’t heartfelt enough. They wanted me to read some random point about the levees. Mike Myers and I talked about how we had a problem with that word. He said, g“I just don’t want to mispronounce levees.” That was his main goal when we went up there. He was already nervous, and I told him, “Yo, I might stray off the Teleprompter a little bit.” I told him I was going to ad-lib. I was talking to him backstage, and I saw Chris Tucker. I remember telling Chris, “Get ready for live TV.”

PLAYBOY: Did Myers say anything when you got off camera?

WEST: He shook my hand and said, g“It is what it is.”

PLAYBOY: What kind of greeting did you get backstage?

WEST: The Red Cross and the NBC execs didn’t say anything to me. They acted like I wasn’t even in the building. Before that, it was all VIP.

PLAYBOY: How did the day end?

WEST: At the bar, taking shots of Patrón. [laughs] You know, if you go up and hit the class bully in his face, you’re like, m“What am I going to do tomorrow?” I still live in a country that George Bush controls.

PLAYBOY: When NBC broadcast the telethon on the West Coast, it cut your comment about the president.

WEST: I thought that was great because it proved my point about the media. It let America know that the media still censors us and monitors us and brainwashes us. For them to chop it, everybody in America was like, g“Oh shit, they still do that? I thought this was America.” Yeah, this is America. This is America.

PLAYBOY: Did the reaction surprise you?

WEST: A lot of people feel that Bush doesn’t care about poor people. It’s a common opinion.

PLAYBOY: But you didn’t say he doesn’t care about poor people; you said he doesn’t care about black people. There’s a difference.

WEST: There just happen to be way more poor black people. If you pick at the statement, I’m sure you could find something wrong, but that was the overall feeling of America at the time.

PLAYBOY: Entertainers don’t often really speak their mind, especially not on live TV.

WEST: And entertainers who would say what they’re thinking wouldn’t be given that opportunity on live TV. Networks are more

apt to put a five-second delay on me now. They didn't really listen to g"All Falls Down" and "Jesus Walks" and "Crack Music." They just heard the hooks. They didn't hear what I was saying about social issues. With my polo collars popped, they never saw me coming.

PLAYBOY: There's an element of social awareness to your music but also a party element. They probably thought they were going to get the second guy.

WEST: I bet they wouldn't have put Dave Chappelle up there. But that's who I am: I'm like the rap version of Chappelle.

PLAYBOY: What's the similarity?

WEST: He talks about serious things, but he makes you laugh to keep from crying. The humor is the honey in the medicine.

PLAYBOY: Actually Chappelle's been doing a joke about you: g"I gotta give props to my man Kanye West because he said some real shit. That took a lot of bravery and a lot of strength. I'm proud of Kanye. And I'm gonna miss him so much."

WEST: [Laughs] Oh shit. That's why we were popping Patrón that night.

PLAYBOY: Laura Bush denounced your comment as disgusting, and Bill O'Reilly said it was g"simply nutty" and called you a "dopey little rapper." Did any of the criticism bother you?

WEST: I didn't even know that until now. I care as much about Bill O'Reilly as I care about somebody at my show who goes to the bathroom during g"Jesus Walks." I'm not going to stop the song; I'm not going to stop my show. Matter of fact, I need to never say his name again, because I'm making him too hot right now.

PLAYBOY: He does love to pick on rappers.

WEST: He can't pick on us. He picks at us. We're like statues. He picks at pop-culture icons, which is what we rappers are right now, like modern-day royalty.

PLAYBOY: Did anything about the coverage of your comments bother you?

WEST: People kept misquoting me and using incorrect English: [in an exaggerated dialect] m"George Bush don't be carin' 'bout no black people." And I'm like, "I didn't say that."

PLAYBOY: Has the comment hurt you in any way? It seems you got a lot of publicity from it.

WEST: I wouldn't say it was the smartest business move. At this point I'm not going to say any more things that could be harmful to me. **PLAYBOY:** So we shouldn't ask for your position on the war in Iraq or Supreme Court nominees?

WEST: I'm not into politics at all. I can't even name the people in politics. That's not what I do. I've learned from this how powerful my voice is. It's like going to your bank to take out \$20 and seeing \$1 million in your account. You're like, g"Oh shit, what am I gonna do with this?" Now I know my voice is powerful, and I just try to use it wisely.

PLAYBOY: During the telethon, you announced you were going to donate g"the biggest amount I can give." So how much did you donate?

WEST: I would never tell you that. I called my business manager, and I was like, g"Yo, what's the most I can give?" And that's what we gave.

PLAYBOY: You won't name an amount?

WEST: I'll just say it's way more than I would have made in a year if I'd gone to college and gotten my doctorate.

PLAYBOY: Before your career as a rapper, you were one of the biggest producers in hip-hop. How good a rapper are you? The New Yorker described you as m"merely average," and Entertainment Weekly said you have a m"clunky flow."

WEST: I'm nowhere near as good as Jay-Z, Eminem or Nas. So I compensate.

PLAYBOY: How do you compensate?

WEST: With star power, sheer energy, entertainment, videos, really good outfits and overwhelmingly, ridiculously dope tracks. Justin Timberlake isn't the best singer, but he's a true star, the entire package. The main thing I use to make up for my lack of rapping skills is my content, my subject matter.

PLAYBOY: What's an example?

WEST: I'll use words or rhymes no other rapper has used. [raps] m"Take your diamonds and throw m'em up like you're bulimic/ Yeah, the beat cold, but the flow is anemic." Damn, nobody would ever rhyme those two words together. When they come up with a hip-hop curriculum, I want my raps to be in the textbooks.

PLAYBOY: Some people say you just rap about clothes and brand names.

WEST: How could someone possibly say all I do is rap about brands, when my biggest songs don't even really mention them? If someone says that, it's blatantly stupid, and I refuse to argue with a stupid person because from a distance you can't tell who's who.

PLAYBOY: If you're trying to raise people up with your music, why use so many brand names?

WEST: I really do care about the music itself, but I also care about superficial consumer shit. I really like Atlanta strippers, like, a lot. I really like Louis Vuitton. I have multicolor trunks stacked up in my loft in New York.

PLAYBOY: Fine, you have Louis Vuitton in your apartment. But why

put it in your songs?

WEST: What is it they say? g"Great art is met with mediocre initial response." It's the same. If I throw some Gucci and Louis on top of a song that means something, I get your attention. And it comes from the heart. It hurt to be at the Gucci store with a girlfriend, acting like I was going to try on something, and she was busting me because I didn't have enough money for it. [raps] m"Back when Gucci was the shit to rock/Back when Slick Rick got the shit to pop/I'd do anything to say I got it/Damn, them new loafers hurt my pocket." Any person who loves clothes is going to hear that and be like, "Yo, I feel him." Like when I say, "We're all self-conscious/I'm just the first to admit it," many people relate to it.

PLAYBOY: 50 Cent says you owe your success to him because people wanted a rapper who didn't wear a bulletproof jacket and have bullet scars.

WEST: There was no successful black artist who was like a regular person and also liked cars and clothes. That was my niche. On The College Dropout, the songs offer melody and message. That's the main goal. I saw it as a simple math project: If I can rap 70 to 80 percent as good as the beats are, I'll be successful.

PLAYBOY: Why are your songs so much more successful than other rap songs?

"I'm not into
politics at all.
I can't even
name the people
in politics."

WEST: Choruses and hooks. That's why the Black Eyed Peas' g"My Humps" is a killer. That song is just constant hooks all the way. See, people think a chorus is the only hook, but "Gold Digger" has so many hooks in it. Jamie's intro, that's a hook. The drum intro, that's a hook. "I ain't sayin' she a gold digger"; that's a hook. The entire second verse is a hook: "18 years, 18 years." That could be a chorus! "We want pre-nup"; that's a hook. And the white-girl line? That's why I get the big bucks. That's bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, World Series. That's gold.

PLAYBOY: At the end of g"Gold Digger," you say, "When you get on, he'll leave your ass for a white girl."

WEST: It uses profanity, and it's shocking and controversial and fucked-up and funny. It's so perfect and out of the park. It touches on social anxieties and over-compensation and racial tension. Black people say, g"Yeah, that does happen." At one of my concerts I saw white girls with T-shirts that read he'll leave your ass for a white girl. Like, "Yay!" They're very happy about that line.

PLAYBOY: So the combination of hooks and provocation made g"Gold Digger" one of the biggest songs of 2005?

WEST: God wanted me to have g"Gold Digger." You know, I made that song for someone else; I wrote it for Shwnna from Disturbing tha Peace, but she had problems clearing the sample and had to turn her album in. At the end of the day—all bullshit aside, all the shit I talk aside—God hands me these records. And Jon Brion, he was a dope-ass producer, a guy who could just sit there and check my lyrics.

PLAYBOY: Wait. You took advice about rapping from a white piano player? Most rappers would have thrown him out of the studio.

WEST: Right. And that's why so many people make inadequate music. I beg for criticism. I'll get 30 opinions on what's wrong with a song and fix all of those things. So when it comes out, you can't tell me shit. You can't learn anything from a compliment. I also had a poetry instructor. She was on Def Poetry Jam with me, and I was like, Yo, she is so much better than me at this. If I could apply this, I could be like a Bob Dylan, a Bob Marley, a Stevie Wonder, a Prince, a John Lennon. m"Gold Digger" is straight poetry. I'd like to state this, and fuck whoever tells me I can't word it out loud: "Gold Digger" is one of the biggest songs of our lifetime. It'll be there with "In da Club" and "When Doves Cry."

PLAYBOY: Do you expect to win the Grammy for record of the year on February 8?

WEST: For all I know, I'm not going to win one Grammy this year. You know, I talked a lot of shit last year. When I got the 10 nominations for the 2005 awards, I said, g"I'm the face of the Grammys." I thought that was really funny. But it was true at the end of the day. The older voters might have been like—What's my boy's name from the L.A. Times? Bill? Bob?

PLAYBOY: Robert Hilburn. He was the Los Angeles Times music critic for 35 years.

WEST: Yeah. He wrote this dope article, saying, g"Grammy credibility, for the second year in a row, revolves around a single artist: Kanye West." For the 2006 awards the only people I would accept defeating me for album of the year would be System of a Down,

and they didn't get nominated. I made a really good album, but how do I word this? I'm not trying to dis people, but there weren't that many really, really good albums. You know, if you're a championship team, it feels better if the series goes seven games, but this year it's a straight four-game blowout. What albums would be up against me?

PLAYBOY: If you had Grammy voters right here, what would you say to them about why you deserve album of the year?

WEST: First thing I'd say is g"Don't worry about all the things I say in the media. They're just true." [laughs]

PLAYBOY: Having gone to a few of your concerts, we've noticed you have more white fans than most rappers.

WEST: I always wanted to make raps that could be respected in the barbershop but that an old white lady could also understand. So I'm Jadakiss meets Will Smith.

PLAYBOY: Does your having pop hits make it harder for some people to take your music seriously?

WEST: You know, I'm still thinking about the whole Grammy thing. Like, my mother told me I should stop talking, but I wasn't going to stop saying I should win album of the year just so I could win album of the year. I even make it harder for myself by talking

so much shit. There was a TV poll asking, g"Do you think West's comment on NBC will hurt his chances at the Grammys?" And people said, "No, but the way he acted at the awards show last year will hurt his chances." [laughs]

PLAYBOY: What did your mom say to you?

WEST: She told me to shut the fuck up—in like a nice English-professor way.

PLAYBOY: When your mom tells you to shut the fuck up, maybe it's time to shut the fuck up.

WEST: Put it like this: The Grammy award is great. Everybody celebrates you, you get endorsements and everybody looks at you like, yo, this is a really quality artist. But I celebrate awards every day by talking shit,

by saying I'm going to win. Think about that. I didn't win the most Grammys last year, so I would have done myself a disservice not to talk shit when I had the most nominations. That'd be like getting a fucking star in Super Mario Bros. and just walking at a regular pace instead of running around. When you get that star, go and kill as many mushrooms as possible.

PLAYBOY: Still, having pop hits must have drawbacks.

WEST: I want my music to be as real as possible. With the Black Eyed Peas, I feel their music is pure and honest, but I don't think it's perceived as that.

PLAYBOY: That's the second time you've said something good about the Black Eyed Peas.

WEST: I love the Black Eyed Peas!

PLAYBOY: We've always wondered what rapper would risk his reputation to defend them.

WEST: You know, I speak up about whatever I'm feeling, whether it's a common opinion or not. I think they're talented, and I argue with people about them all the time. Well, see, I didn't need to say I have to argue with people, because now they'll read this and feel a little bad about it. It's like when people come up to me in an airport and say, g"Yo, man, I argue with people all the time. I try to tell

"I think I might
have a problem,
a sexual
addiction. I have
porn on me at all
times."

them you not no bitch-ass nigga.”

PLAYBOY: How do you reply to that?

WEST: I say, g“Thank you, I appreciate that. Thank you for telling me you have to argue with people all the time.” [laughs] You don’t want to hear that at eight o’clock in the morning. It implies that everybody’s saying bad stuff about me. They’ll say, m“Well, I thought you were arrogant because I read some article about you.”

PLAYBOY: Why would people think you are arrogant?

WEST: Because of how the media portrays me.

PLAYBOY: Come on, Kanye. If people think you’re arrogant, it’s not only because of how the media portrays you. You’ve got some arrogance in you.

WEST: Nah, I might have some cockiness. It’s always a conflict: Maybe I’m more self-conscious than I am self-confident, and self-consciousness is what makes me ask 30 different people for their opinions. I overcompensate for my anxieties.

PLAYBOY: But you even refer to yourself as g“the international asshole” in one song.

WEST: That’s just playing into what people believe. Like, okay, people have this perception; let’s fuck with it a little bit. Here is a statement that will come off as arrogant: I almost wish I could not be me for a day, just so I could be entertained by the shit I say. [laughs] You know, that’s a good beginning for a rap. It even rhymes. I need to put that in a rap.

PLAYBOY: Let’s talk about your background. Describe the street you grew up on.

WEST: All over the world, actually. I stayed in China an entire year when I was in fifth grade. I stayed in different places growing up in Chicago, all the way from the inner-city South Side, which was gang-populated, to the suburbs, which were gang-populated, to even further suburbs, also gang-populated. In Chicago you’re not getting away from the gangs.

PLAYBOY: Were you in gangs?

WEST: No. I was always focused on something creative. It would seem like I was in my own world. I’m sure you’d say I was special.

PLAYBOY: In what way were you special?

WEST: Well, I grew up to become me.

PLAYBOY: Okay, but what was special about you at the age of 10?

WEST: I was a performer and a ham and just wanted to entertain. I would always ask questions; I was never good with g“Because I told you so.” And I hate when parents try to stop their kids from asking questions. Kids should ask as many questions as possible. Whenever I’m around somebody I admire, I question them to death.

PLAYBOY: Were you funny-looking? Didn’t you have braces?

WEST: Not until high school. People in my family would act like my teeth were okay, but whenever we were talking about each other, that would be the main joke. I went to a girlfriend’s house, and her neighbor’s sister said, g“Your teeth are big and white just like horse teeth.” I said, “Fuck this.” When I got braces, the orthodontist had to remove eight teeth. And I’ve got a big mouth! So imagine how big my teeth were.

PLAYBOY: You’re very close to your mother. Would it be fair to say you were a mama’s boy?

WEST: Yeah, I’d say so. My dad had a lot of influence too.

PLAYBOY: He was a Black Panther, and to a lot of people that means a militant, Afrocentric separatist.

WEST: He wasn’t a separatist. We lived in an all-white neighborhood. It’s funny. He was like, g“I don’t want anybody to know I’m a Black Panther.” He was a military brat, so he was raised around white people, but they didn’t like him because he was black. Then he’d go around black people, and they didn’t like him because he talked white. It was hard for him, and he was always looking for a home or a movement, something to be part of.

PLAYBOY: It sounds as if you had a happy childhood even

though your parents divorced.

WEST: Yeah, I used that to my advantage. I’d ask Mom for something, then ask Dad for something.

PLAYBOY: Were you a spoiled only child?

WEST: I was taught a lot about morals and values. My father or stepfather would have me cutting the grass while everybody else was playing basketball. Or my mother would buy me only two pairs of shoes a year when she could afford to buy a pair of shoes every month. That made me appreciate stuff. And it made me feel a want or a need for stuff. So now when I buy clothes, I really do feel fulfilled. Like a little kid who always wanted to go to Disney World: You go to Disney World, and it’s great. So Gucci is like Disney World for me.

PLAYBOY: But there must have been something bothering you as a kid, because you were a bed wetter.

WEST: Yeah, I don’t want to talk about that.

PLAYBOY: Why not? You even mention it in a song.

WEST: [Silence, shakes head]

PLAYBOY: Okay, so tell us about your grandfather Portwood Williams. He was involved in the civil-rights movement in Oklahoma in 1958, which you refer to in g“Never Let Me Down.”

WEST: He’s just a great figure in Oklahoma City. He’s got monuments and stuff. Yeah, he’s the number-one stunner. He’ll start off a sentence by saying, g“I am the master,” the same way other people would say “Hello” or “How are you?” He loves having me as a grandson. He’ll be like, “Yo, my grandson is Kanye.”

PLAYBOY: It’s easy to see where you got your confidence.

WEST: But he’s way more eloquent. People say I’m a good speaker for a rapper, but I fall short. I can’t talk after Barack Obama or Oprah Winfrey. Ninety percent of the time I fall short of my goal. I want my concert to be as stunning as U2’s or Michael Jackson’s. People say my show is great, but I know it’s not as good as that Talking Heads DVD I just saw, *Stop Making Sense*. See, I threw out that Talking Heads reference to sound like I know a lot about music.

PLAYBOY: You keep revising many of your songs until the last possible second. Isn’t that a difficult way to work?

WEST: I envy people who settle for mediocrity. Right when *Late Registration* was about to come out, I was driving myself crazy. The years I’m losing off my life stressing out about a drum sound are the reason people can go to the store and purchase albums of the caliber of *Late Registration*. My pain is everyone else’s pleasure. Everything I worry about is a gift I give to the world. I can’t say I perfected my album, but any song that’s perfect would be bad because imperfection is a quality people relate to.

PLAYBOY: Is that why you sing on your records?

WEST: Are you asking me if I sing to make my records worse? [laughs] Yeah. I was singing on the original version of m“*Heard m’Em Say*,” and I felt like it was making it too “worse.” I used incorrect English on purpose—just put worse in quotation marks.

PLAYBOY: In g“*Drive Slow*” you talk about being a teenage virgin. How old were you when you lost your virginity?

WEST: [To girlfriend] Can you please leave the room? [she leaves] I was 17, which is remarkably late by our standards. I think my game was wack.

PLAYBOY: So who took your virginity?

WEST: She was my girlfriend, and she had great titties, even by my standards today. She had a bit of a gut, though. I wouldn’t fuck with that now. She was short, like five-foot-four, with 36Ds. And the nipples were almost the same color as the skin. I used to love those fucking titties. I’d stare at them.

PLAYBOY: Your game has gotten a lot better in the past few years. Are you taking advantage of your fame?

WEST: In between having a girlfriend, sure, but I don’t really wild



out. I'll show you some of my girlfriends' pictures on a website as long as you don't print the name of it. If I were to tell you, g"Yo, I did this and this," it might be a little bit tasteless coming from me. **PLAYBOY:** You graduated from high school in 1995, and your breakthrough was Jay-Z's *The Black Album*, which came out in 2001. What were you doing in between those years?

WEST: I went to college for a year and a half. I worked a telemarketing job, selling insurance to people who bought stuff with a Montgomery Ward credit card. I was way better than most of the people there. I could sit around and draw pictures, basically do other shit while I was reading the Teleprompter. [laughs] Even back then I would stray from the Teleprompter.

PLAYBOY: You've also been producing since you were in seventh grade. Were you able to sell the tracks you made?

WEST: I was hustling beats, selling them to local drug dealers for \$200 or \$250. I had a platinum plaque when I was 19 for working on Jermaine Dupri's first album. I was making \$60,000 or \$70,000 a year by the age of 20 or 21.

PLAYBOY: But you had a lot of frustration too. Your career stalled.

WEST: I couldn't make ends meet. You're chasing dreams, you want something so bad, you're so close to it. I remember me and Just Blaze would have beats on the same album, and six months later he'd have 20 more beats sold and I'd have one beat sold. And it hurt. Like, damn, I thought we were the same caliber. But he could buy whatever he wanted, and I wasn't sure I could pay the rent.

PLAYBOY: Even though you couldn't pay the rent, you were telling people you'd be bigger than Michael Jackson.

WEST: I didn't say that all the time, but I remember telling executives at Sony that.

PLAYBOY: That's awfully cocky for a guy who had nothing.

WEST: Hey, you gotta dream big. What's the point in saying, g"I'm gonna be bigger than Tito Jackson"?

PLAYBOY: For a guy with that much confidence, it must have been a shock to struggle at selling your music.

WEST: I had one nervous breakdown I talk about on g"Touch the Sky," when I busted out crying. My girlfriend and I were in a room together, listening to the first Lil' Kim CD, *Hard Core*. I would listen to Lil' Kim, then listen to my beat, another Lil' Kim song, then my beat. It sounded like the same caliber to me, but I couldn't sell a fucking beat. And I just stood next to that stereo and busted out crying and shaking. I didn't have control of my body, didn't have control of my emotions. It didn't make any sense. If I could have sold even one beat, that \$7,500 would have meant so much to me. I was living in New York, 600 miles from home, and had \$300 in my bank account. You should never have less in your account than how far you are from your crib.

PLAYBOY: Once you were established as a producer, what kind of response did you get when you told people you wanted to rap too?

WEST: So many people thought I was wack.

PLAYBOY: Well, rappers are supposed to be from the hood. You grew up middle-class in the suburbs. Jay-Z says he didn't believe

in you because you weren't ghetto.

WEST: Yeah, but also my raps were trying to be ghetto. They didn't believe that, coming from me. I had to figure out my niche.

PLAYBOY: Can we hear one of your ghetto rhymes?

WEST: It was something like, g"I got the platinum chain to show you what my stacks is about/And a platinum gat to back up what I'm rapping about." It was good wordplay. Some people believed in me. They thought the shit was pretty hot. People always talk about how bad my raps were, but if you go back and listen to them, they're better than a lot of shit that's out today.

PLAYBOY: So when did people start to believe in you?

WEST: With g"Slow Jamz," when you heard the line "She got a light-skinned friend look like Michael Jackson/Got a dark-skinned friend look like Michael Jackson," you all knew you were dealing with a star. That is one of the greatest punch lines in rap history.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about your car accident. You fell asleep at the wheel when you were making *The College Dropout*.

WEST: Okay. Damn, there is a lot of interesting stuff that happened to me.

PLAYBOY: When you came to, what did you see in the mirror?

WEST: I saw my mouth getting bigger and bigger, like in a horror movie. My jaw was separated, and inside it was broken open. I was in the car for like 10 minutes before anybody got there, and I called my girlfriend and my mother to apologize for hurting myself. I didn't know if I was going to be able to rap again. I'd been working so hard to do this album—I already had g"All Falls Down" and "Jesus Walks."

PLAYBOY: What happened when you got to the emergency room?

WEST: Man, that was a bad experience. The things they had to do to support my jaw were just hurting it worse. This one lady kept on talking to me. I said, g"Why are you talking to me? Can't you see my mouth is fucked up?" But she kept on having me talk. You know how they keep you talking so you don't die or something? But it was like they were about to make me die—talk me to death, literally.

PLAYBOY: And you say the accident was good for your career. How?

WEST: That's one of the best things that can happen to a rapper, to almost die. Tupac, 50 Cent and now me. People connected with that.

PLAYBOY: It made you seem a little tougher. People don't usually think of you as tough.

WEST: I'm not a tough guy, but I'm a strong person. Rap music innately has to be hard. But we've changed what it means to be hard because life itself is hard. I've started presenting the hardship of regular people's lives. Hard isn't always g"I went to jail" or "I have to shoot somebody. I'm gonna kill somebody today." Hard is anything: "I have a test to take." All I did was see the open lane.

PLAYBOY: The reaction to *The College Dropout* wasn't quite instant acclaim.

WEST: When it first came out, I was frustrated that people didn't believe in me. That's when you would read quotes that came off as more arrogant or defensive than funny. Now I don't have to be defensive at all. When people try to attack me, it's like, Come on, fam. What else do you need me to do?

"I try to walk and be more Christlike. I'm a man, and I have shortcomings. But I think if there were a bible written today in the new millennium, I'd be one of the characters in it."





PLAYBOY: Late Registration has some conspiracy-theory lyrics. Do you believe the government is spreading AIDS, as you suggest in m“*Heard m‘Em Say*”?

WEST: Right now? No. But I do believe the theory that AIDS was being placed in Africa. I do believe the FBI placed crack in the black community. I believe the U.S. government gave smallpox to the Indians. I believe financial institutions are capitalizing on the African AIDS epidemic.

PLAYBOY: Not all of those theories are equally credible. What’s your source for the government starting AIDS in Africa?

WEST: You know what? I don’t have the answer to that. Life isn’t a big test in which I have to know the answer right now. People always want me to say things in black-and-white. g“*What’s your answer to this?*” So many people hang on every word I say. I feel like I’m in *Forrest Gump*, the scene when he’s running and everybody’s coming up alongside him, asking, m“*What do you think about this?*” He steps in shit and says, “*Shit happens,*” and then there are bumper stickers. That’s my life right now.

PLAYBOY: What would we find if we drug-tested you?

WEST: Does alcohol show up? You’d find some Hennessy, some Belvedere and that’s it. The only drug I’ve done is weed. I used to smoke weed like every day. I hated it, though. It gave me a headache. But I’m really intrigued by the 1980s white yuppie cocaine culture. That was an inspiration for *Late Registration*: white modern buildings, leather jackets, Lamborghinis, model bitches, all that. I wanted to make the album darker and sexier than the first one. I don’t do any other form of drug. My only drug is porn.

PLAYBOY: What’s your taste in porn?

WEST: *Elegant Angel* is pretty good, and the Brazilian joints are crazy.

PLAYBOY: Are you unapologetic about porn? Do you play it in front of your girlfriend?

WEST: Yeah, I’ll just keep it on. That’s one of the old pimp moves: If the girl comes over, have porn playing. If she’s like, g“*Ugh,*” hurry up and turn it off. “*Man, I don’t know who left that on!*” And if she says, “*Hmm, what’s this?*” then keep it playing, keep it playing, [laughs]

PLAYBOY: Not everyone admits to liking porn.

WEST: We all like porn; I’m just the first to admit it. I could show you examples of some things I like.

PLAYBOY: Let’s look at the bookmarks on your laptop: g“*Ass man’s paradise,*” “*Mexican lust.*”

WEST: I have normal conversations all the time while I’m looking at these sites. If this were a phone interview, I’d probably be looking at porn. It’s an addiction. Whenever we go to the porn store, we call it the crack house. And I stash my porn just like someone would stash weed, in a baggie. Here, these are some really good ones.

PLAYBOY: Let’s see what you’ve got in the bag. *Ghetto Booty*. *Housewives Gone Black, Part 3*. *She’s Got Ass, Part 9*. *My Daughter Is Fucking Blackzilla*. *All That Ass Brazil 30*. *Black and Wild, Volume 18*.

WEST: This girl’s incredible. See that? **PLAYBOY**

would never have that. I don't think PLAYBOY has enough ass. But the best girl you had in the past three years has to be Rita G., the Spanish girl. She's got an ass even white people like. **PLAYBOY:** One of your biggest songs is g"Jesus Walks." Is Jesus happy with you?

WEST: God is. I personally believe Jesus died for our sins, because that's the way I was raised. Same reason I like fat asses: That's how I was raised. If I had been raised in an all-white community, maybe I'd like skinny asses. I try to walk and be more Christlike. I'm a man, and I have shortcomings. But I think if there were a bible written today in the new millennium, I'd be one of the characters in it.

PLAYBOY: What role would you play in this bible?

WEST: I'd be a griot. I bring up historical subjects in a way that makes kids want to learn about them. I'm an inspirational speaker. I changed the sound of music more than one time: I did it with The Blueprint, did it again with The College Dropout. For all these reasons, I'd be a part of the bible. I'm definitely in the history books already. m"Jesus Walks"—that song will never go away.

PLAYBOY: Is the devil trying to get you too?

WEST: Always. Let's take it back to Atlanta, back to the strippers. You know, when Marvin Gaye made g"Sexual Healing," it was a fun song, but he really did have a problem with sex. And I think I might have a problem, a sexual addiction. I have porn on me at all times.

PLAYBOY: Haven't you mostly been in relationships for the past few years?

WEST: Lust is part of the reason I've been out of relationships too. I just want to do it all the time. All the time. Like four times a night. And then in the morning.

PLAYBOY: Are you bothered by your addictions?

WEST: In g"Touch the Sky," I say, "I'm trying to right my wrongs/But it's funny them same wrongs help me write this song." Those addictions and afflictions are what make me a great artist. If I were perfect, if I didn't have any conflicts, what would I have to say? My biggest problem is lust, looking at girls with big booties.

PLAYBOY: You're one of the few rappers who have spoken out against homophobia. How did that go over?

WEST: I got more backlash for that than I did for my George Bush comment. I said it's wrong to discriminate against gays, to call them fags and to gay bash. And people were like, g"We don't agree with you. We feel like it's okay to do that." What I said about Bush was just popular opinion, but homophobia is so taboo to talk about. If you bring it up, people say you must be gay, and then they hate you also. In the black community, not just in rap, it's a thing people stay away from. They mention gays only in a negative way, even if they have a gay cousin or they know the choir director. And I had to learn from experience. I felt like it was okay to say "fag."

PLAYBOY: In the past you used the word fag in your songs.

WEST: Yeah, I'm sure I did. Even to this day I'm dealing with my personal homophobia. I'm not gay, and I don't feel comfortable in a gay bar. I wouldn't be at a gay parade.

PLAYBOY: It's possible to be opposed to gay bashing but still feel some homophobia.

WEST: Yeah, like I think it's wrong to lust, but I still end up at the strip club.

PLAYBOY: What hip-hop trend would you like to see die?

WEST: Hip-hop trends die on their own. That's like going to a senior citizens' home and asking, g"Who do you want to die?" Yo, they're all going to die pretty soon! That's what hip-hop is about. At the point when my albums become classic, they transcend hip-hop. Because hip-hop is about being fresh.

PLAYBOY: You said earlier that you were making \$70,000 a year when you were 21. How much have you made in the past year?

WEST: Millions. With a real long s at the end. Yeah, millionssssss.

PLAYBOY: Here's one number we heard. A movie studio paid \$700,000 for the use of g"Jesus Walks" in Jarhead.

WEST: Let me check with my lawyer. So add that up, that's one thing, and I have multiple movie offers and multiple shows. But I need to figure out a way to make more.

PLAYBOY: You're not making enough money?

WEST: No, I'm not. Not to do all the things I want to do creatively. Now that I can get pretty much anything I want for myself, I want to show people art. I want people to know about the architecture in Prague. I'd like to purchase a castle in Europe and renovate it. I want to design buildings. I want to produce movies and have complete ownership so I don't have to run ideas by people. I'm meeting with the biggest movie director in the game. I don't want to say his name.

PLAYBOY: Well, the biggest director in Hollywood is Steven Spielberg. Is that who you're meeting with?

WEST: Okay, yeah. And I'm writing a TV show with Rick Rubin and Larry Charles, who wrote Seinfeld with Larry David. So it's like the real shit. I've been talking to Ben Stiller about some things. This year I met with the Steves: Stevie Wonder, Steve Jobs and Steven Spielberg. I'm going to the Kanye Wests of their genres.

PLAYBOY: What about music?

WEST: What about it? Asking me g"What about music?" is like coming to Spielberg and asking him "What about movies?" This is what I do and what I will continue to do at the highest caliber possible.

PLAYBOY: Are you producing anyone?

WEST: I'm producing Jay-Z's new album. I'm doing the whole thing.

PLAYBOY: Wait a minute. When we interviewed Jay-Z in PLAYBOY three years ago, he told us he was retiring. And we made him a bet: If he comes out of retirement, he owes us \$1,000.

WEST: Well, he's about to pay.

PLAYBOY: Rap careers come and go in a pretty short time. As you said, trends die out; even the hot producers burn out quickly. How long are you going to stick around?

WEST: As long as I want to. I've had beats that were impactful on the culture for the past six years, and I'm not stopping anytime soon. I see things I still want to do that no one has done before. I could be the Steve Jobs of hip-hop. I'm making a beat a day, and they're coming out pretty good.

PLAYBOY: Yeah, but in g"Spaceship" you say you used to make five beats a day. You're slowing down.

WEST: Yeah, you can put that in the story. Kanye's falling off. [laughs] He's making only one beat a day.



ELEGANCE
REIMAGINED

Lilly
Robinson

Photography by Rocky Batchelor | @rockybatchelor









Happy to have you on the cover of Playboy! Can you tell us what the inspiration behind this photo shoot was? Thank you so much for having me, what a surreal experience this has been! This shoot was inspired by my own personal desires and kinks... I don't mind getting down and dirty every now and then, hahaha.

Best place you have ever been to in the world? I haven't done as much traveling as I would have liked, so there's still a lot to see, but so far, Sri Lanka! There was just so much culture across the entire country, we did a food tour and it was so nice to learn the local traditional dishes.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? This was definitely one of my dreams I didn't think I'd get to live out, but here we are! definitely to own my own home, get married, have a few more kids, and just

be happy and content in my little life. Oh and do a whole lot more traveling.

What helps you decompress and relax? I really enjoy spending time laying in the sun at the beach, shopping, and people-watching (as weird as that sounds haha), I just enjoy watching the world go by, everyone in their own little worlds.

Who has been the most influential person in your life and why? I definitely have to say, my mum, it's been just her and I ever since I was really little. We came from absolutely nothing, had nothing, rented a shoebox of a unit, and struggled to make ends meet, but I never went without, and she never let me see how hard it was for her. My mum worked so hard to put herself and me where we are now, she's a successful business owner and property investor.





She's always been my biggest supporter, no matter whether she agreed with my choice or not. It's not always been an easy road, but I know she's always had my back.

How romantic are you? I definitely think I'm quite romantic! I love to be 'wooded', whether that's with an extravagant planned out date, or a nice dinner and flowers, or a spontaneous home movie date night. I really like to be shown that I'm worth the effort of those things.

What is the most memorable date you've ever had? I flew to Sydney to spend a weekend in Kangaroo Valley as a first date with my now partner. We spent the weekend in a beautiful little house, with an outdoor bath, eating cheese platters, and drinking wine by the fire.

We went horse riding, he taught me how to drive a manual, and went wine tasting. Definitely, the most memorable (and longest) date I've ever had.

What makes you the ultimate partner to have? Once I'm in, I'm ALL in. I am so committed, loving, caring, and doting, I always try my best to provide in a partner's love language. I think I do so many small, 'behind-the-scenes' things that most partners wouldn't think to do, just to make their life run a little smoother. I'm also quite the nympho...

How important is sex to you in a relationship? I think sexual compatibility is important because good sex can make a great relationship. For me, regular sex is important to stay connected to your partner, otherwise it eventually just feels

like good mates.

What is your idea of a really good time? Honestly, I love going to Harris Farm and buying a whole bunch of fresh produce, meats, dips, bread, and having a beautiful picnic in the sun on a blanket, with my daughter and partner. Nothing beats quality time and some vitamin D.

Any word of advice to fans on the right way to approach you? Please remember that I'm still just another human being, and be respectful!! But I love a good chat and a bit of banter.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, any last words to our readers? If you've made it this far, thank you so much for being here and taking some time to get to know me a little better.











Welcome to **FLLWR**, where a comedian offers five
recs carefully selected to amuse and inspire you in
these unusual times

FLWR

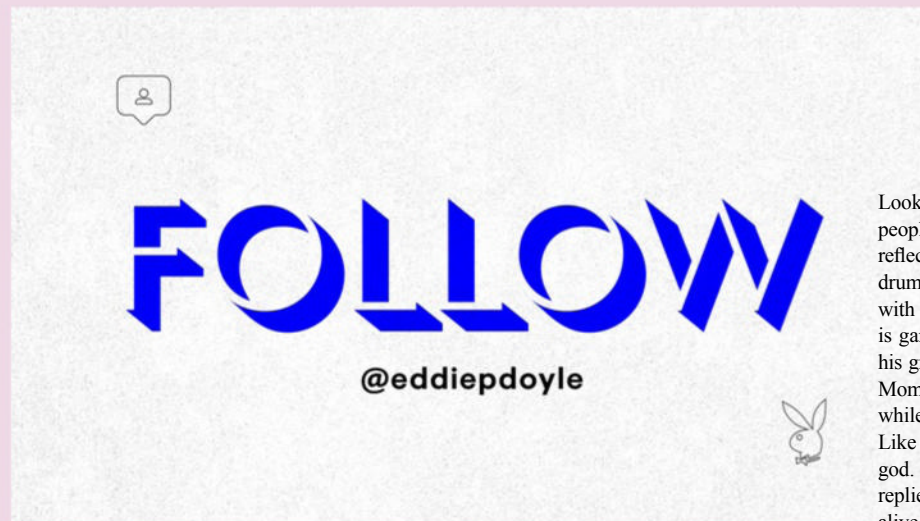
Follow, Listen, Laugh, Watch, Read: Five Recs From Comedian Beth Stelling

WRITTEN BY
BETH STELLING

INTRODUCTION
JAMES RICKMAN



With a daunting array of specials, writing credits, TV and podcast appearances, and best “stand-up” accolades, Beth Stelling is more than qualified to make you rethink Uncle Kracker (see below). Girl Daddy, a special whose name projects the odious label “female comic” onto hypothetical motherhood, premieres August 20 on HBO Max.



Look, as much as I love watching videos of people falling down stairs, cats fighting their reflections in the mirror and a goose playing a drum with his feet, I had to choose something with a little more substance. And that substance is garlic powder. I first came across Eddie and his grandma, whom he occasionally calls Mom Mom, in a video he took at the kitchen table while she seasoned her eggs with garlic powder. Like a lot of garlic powder. Eddie: “Oh my god. Mom Mom. That’s insane!” To which she replies: “You’re insane. That’s what keeps me alive!” I guess I love the sweetness in Eddie’s voice when he talks to his grandma, and the volume at which he has to deliver it in order for her to hear. Mom Mom never fails to make me laugh with her confident snark, which can only be gained from living on this planet as long as she has.

Because I tend to choose a song and listen to it on repeat for days on end, that song usually colors a particular time in my life or attaches itself to a memory. Monica Martin’s “Cruel” underscored the wintry days I spent in New York City late 2018 staying at the Standard Hotel in the West Village after I headlined Gotham Comedy Club. I got a room for myself overlooking the Hudson River that I thought would provide the perfect setting to write, but they were doing construction every day. Loud banging, drills, wrenches maybe? It felt like they were cutting my room out of the side of the building. One afternoon I started to take a bath to relax, and the tub filled with brown water. So I toweled off, turned Monica up in my headphones, took a topless selfie and wrote some jokes before walking to my sets at the Comedy Cellar. I can barely choose a “Cruel” lyric to share, because I love all of them, but I’ll go with the opening line: “Angel on my shoulder till I lost it / I’m barely out the door and she’s exhausted.”



I wasn't introduced to stand-up until I was 18 years old, and after deciding I wanted to try to be one I avoided watching it altogether: I was terrified of stealing material or a persona. Now I'm in a place where I can watch stand-up, but it's harder to elicit laughter because I've seen too much and know the tricks. This special, taped in 1979, took me on a ride and made me laugh out loud. Pryor is everything I aim to be: silly, dark, real, subtle, animated, vulnerable. So while Pryor's name is probably not new to you, 41 years later the jokes are still relevant. I found that incredible and sad.



LAUGH

Richard Pryor: Live in Concert 1979



WATCH

Normal People



Seriously screw this show for making all other love stories complete trash, including the ones I've personally experienced. For starters Normal People is beautifully filmed in Ireland, Italy and Sweden. I've only been to one of those places and no one like Connell kissed me. The acting, direction and writing (based on Sally Rooney's novel) are so captivating that I'm hesitant to even try to describe them to you. Just know that if Normal People were written about the first time I fell in love, it would be filmed in southwest Ohio as one long shot of me talking on a landline in my closet after setting my AIM away message to an Uncle Kracker lyric. BDStelling: "Follow me / Everything is all right / I'll be the one to tuck you in at night / And if you want to leave I can guarantee / You won't find nobody else like me."

Does it count as reading if you listen to it? The new age-old question. This book was recommended to me by comedian Charla Lauriston when we were writing on season 3 of The Last O.G. It's a compilation of advice columns that Strayed wrote anonymously, mostly for the online literary magazine The Rumpus. So the cat's out of the bag that Sugar is Strayed, and her book offers superb life and love advice from someone you know has lived without bumpers. I liked the audiobook because it's narrated by Sugar herself, in a calming voice that tempers some of the heavier essays.



READ

Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar by Cheryl Strayed





Man in His **DOMAIN** **Chris Brickley**

The NBA skills coach built a career out of helping athletes train. Get to know the man with the VIP gym, famous friends, a bevy of brand deals and one unexpected pandemic pivot

BY SOWMYA KRISHNAMURTHY

PHOTOGRAPHED BY GUY LOWNDES

There's no place like home. If Chris Brickley clicked his heels three times, it would be in black-and-white Puma sneakers—size 12—and matching Gucci socks. No matter where he is, he wants to return here: his gym in the heart of Manhattan.

"This is my place," he says, affectionately kicking the gleaming hardwood. "This is my love."

The NBA trainer reigns over perhaps the most famous gym in the world. Dubbed the Arena, Brickley designed the basketball court to be his oasis. Before the pandemic hit, he spent up to 14 hours here on any given day. Carmelo Anthony, D'Angelo Russell and James Harden could be spotted running drills or in pickup games during the off-season. Rapper J. Cole works on his shot here. So does Meek Mill. Earlier this year, before coronavirus, Justin Bieber and Quavo challenged Drake to a friendly match at the Arena that overshadowed the All-Star Weekend Celebrity Game.

The space—nestled inside Summit, a luxury high-rise with a sweeping glass lobby, indoor waterfall and panoramic vistas—opened in February 2019. A grayscale New York City skyline wraps the gym walls, the neutral motif accented by the orange splash of basketball rims. It's a calm respite from the hustle of Midtown. "This is a therapeutic place," Brickley says.

The Arena is invite-only, but social media—especially during the NBA's lengthy lockdown—has amplified the gym to legendary status. Brickley shares vignettes on Instagram that often go viral, aggregated by sports and celebrity media. TMZ even camps outside sometimes, ostensibly looking for a scoop or sound bite. Hip-hop usually pipes out of the gym speakers, but this afternoon it's quiet and empty.

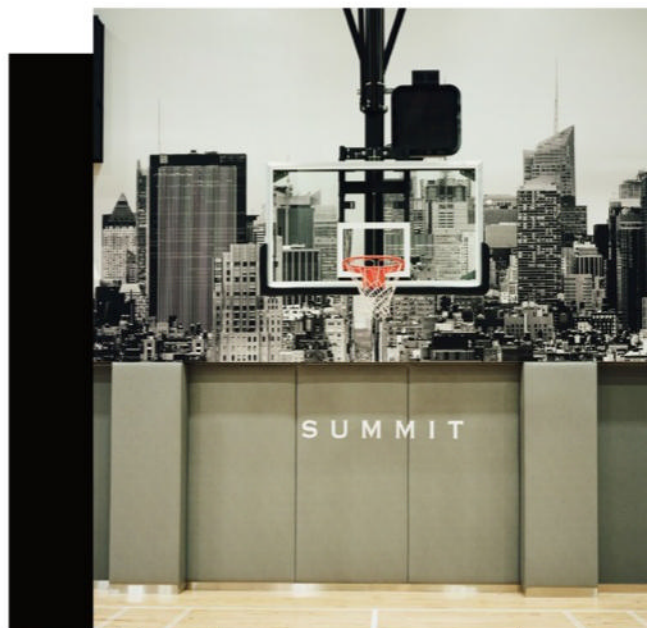
At 34, Chris Brickley is living a basketball fever dream. He was the first trainer to sign his own sneaker deal with Puma Hoops and the first trainer to be given a character in NBA2K20. "You keep working the way you did, the sky's the limit," his doppelgänger avatar says, in his voice. "Hit me up next time you want to work. I basically live in the gym." Last year, Brickley starred in and executive-produced the ESPN+ docuseries *Declared*, about prospects trying to level up to the pros, which landed him a spot on national TV as a commentator during the 2019 NBA draft. When I saw him in Chicago this February for All-Star Weekend, his itinerary was dizzying: hanging with the owners of the New York Knicks, Minnesota Timberwolves and Sacramento Kings; a basketball clinic at a community center; brunch with entrepreneur Gary Vaynerchuk.

As his NBA2K20 character implies, Brickley really does live for work. He calls his gym his "girlfriend," and his two phones don't ever seem to stop buzzing. He has 1,200 unread texts and a deluge of direct messages.

"I feel like every week, there's something new I could be doing," he says in a pleasant New Hampshire accent. Hold on just a second—an A-list rapper is blowing him up. Okay, he's back. He sleeps three, maybe four hours a night. Even during relaxed moments he's often scribbling in the notebooks that are his constant companion, documenting his ideas, plans, hopes. It's about pushing himself. "I need to keep doing things that are special," he says. "I need to keep signing deals that no one's ever done."

Chris Brickley grew up wanting to hoop. As a kid, his favorite team was the Boston Celtics; he'd pretend he was Peter "Pistol Pete" Maravich on the court. At Trinity High School in Manchester, New Hampshire, Brickley was twice named

"There's no medicine that makes me feel better. I guess if you really want to break it down, basketball has saved my life."





athlete of the year. At six-foot-four, he played a couple of seasons at the University of Louisville before pivoting into coaching. Things lined up. He became the youngest Division I assistant coach in the NCAA in 2011 and joined the New York Knicks in player development in 2013. A wunderkind, he impressed the likes of coaching legend Phil Jackson, but beneath the veneer of success Brickley was struggling.

"Every year, I was living check to check," he says. As he nurtured relationships with high-profile pros like Carmelo Anthony and J.R. Smith, he was also coping with low moments—eviction notices and bank overdrafts were a regular part of Brickley's life. But by 2016 he was confident enough in his growing Rolodex to venture out on his own. Leaving a steady gig with the Knicks—what many would see as a dream job—seemed beyond risky to some.

"My family was mad. My friends didn't understand. I didn't have health insurance," he says. "But I just truly believed in myself, knew that this was going to work out for me."

Brickley's gamble paid off. Today not only are his training talents in high demand, but his name as well: in April, he partnered with Chipotle for a namesake burrito bowl and in August, he announced a deal with streetwear reseller StockX. With nearly 1 million Instagram followers, he's become a bona fide influencer. Before the pandemic hit and sent everyone inside, it was hard to walk down the street with him—be it in SoHo, Harlem or Chicago—without somebody vying for his attention: Fans who want to dap him up, take a selfie or just smile and softly murmur, "Hey, Brick," in passing.

Building relationships—be it with brands, fans or basketball players—is the crux of Brickley's style. Tactical skills aside, when he's in training mode, it's imperative that he connect with his player: What motivates him? What makes him tick? Friendship and trust are key. "You can know all the basketball stuff in the world, but if you don't have a relationship with the players, they're not going to really listen to you," he tells me. Brickley also does his homework. As Kevin Porter Jr. of the Cleveland Cavaliers said on Declared, "He knows your game before you even step foot on the

court. Before the first workout."

"Chris has created a sacred space," says Graham Betchart, a mental-skills coach who works with players like Aaron Gordon and Ben Simmons and has seen Brickley training. "It's a safe place for these athletes to come be themselves. And for most of them, they don't have many safe places." It's a judgment-free zone where men can let down their guard. Adrenaline pumping, it's not uncommon to talk about life, relationships, whatever. Says Brickley, "They can come in here and they can be vulnerable. And they know no one's judging them."

Brickley is candid about his own tribulations, including his difficult childhood with a mother who lived with mental illnesses and died by suicide in 1993. "She was sick. I know she loved me and she was just going through hard times." Several of his tattoos commemorate her. As an adult, he can empathize with what his mother must have gone through, and mental health awareness is a cause to which he is committed. Whenever he needs to untangle dark or complex feelings, he returns to his place of catharsis.

"There's no medicine that makes me feel better. It's the gym," he says. "I guess if you really want to break it down, basketball has saved my life."

The fact that Brickley is able to speak openly about his personal sorrows reflects something larger: Basketball stars are increasingly part of a paradigm shift in masculinity and mental health, going public about issues that previously would have remained private. Kevin Love of the Cleveland Cavaliers wrote a 2018 essay, "Everyone Is Going Through Something," about his panic attack;



it went viral. Love was inspired to open up in part thanks to DeMar DeRozan, then of the Toronto Raptors, who had come forward about his depression and anxiety. “It’s one of them things that no matter how indestructible we look like we are, we’re all human at the end of the day,” DeRozan told the Toronto Star.

The loss of Lakers legend Kobe Bryant earlier this year shook the world of basketball. The league collectively grieved, with men in the spotlight expressing their pain and emotion. “Today is one of the saddest days in my lifetime,” said Dwyane Wade on Instagram. Trae Young of the Atlanta Hawks broke down in his mother’s arms before a game. Countless others shared their devastation on social media. For Brickley, it was poignant. “I see the players’ vulnerable stages. It really touches me when you start seeing them do it publicly.”

Normally, Chris Brickley lives for summer. When the NBA season is over, his gym comes alive—he anticipates it for months. But this year the coronavirus pandemic changed all that. In March, New York City shut down gyms, along with pretty much everything else, and the trainer’s plans were put on hold.

“It hit me crazy because this is usually my time,” he tells me via Zoom in July. “This is usually my busy time, doing 10 workouts a day, seven days a week. It’s tough.”

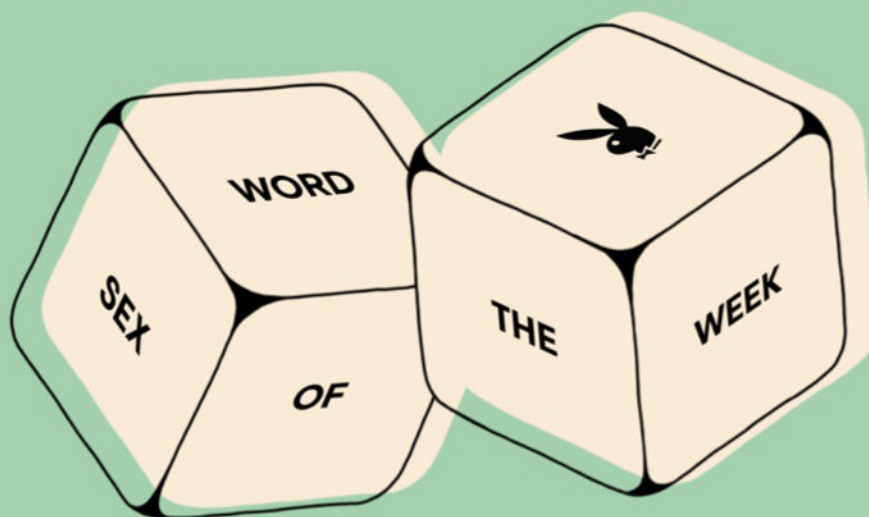
Brickley has been in the gym intermittently during lockdown, hammering out new drills and occasionally doing socially distanced workouts. College star Cole Anthony, who declared for the 2020 draft, was one of the few players who came in for a late-night session.

As the NBA tests its grand quarantine experiment at Disney World inside the so-called bubble, the new normal has been a challenge for Brickley, and not just in terms of his training dropping off. “When you’re a social person and you thrive off of other people’s energy, and you don’t have that, you have to figure out other ways to get it.”

So the trainer is funneling his energy into new creative endeavors, including a compilation of workout anthems called *Welcome to the Grind*. “Every time we work out, music is such a big thing,” he says. Brickley envisions the album, which he describes as a hip-hop update of Jock Jams, as a way for fans to soundtrack their sessions like the pros and to reproduce a slice of the Arena’s atmosphere inside their own homes. Executive-produced by Dave East and Lil Durk, *Welcome to the Grind* will feature tracks from artists that Brickley has forged friendships with through the years; Meek Mill, Travis Scott and Justin Bieber are likely contributors.

Brickley is targeting an early 2021 release for the project; hopefully, that time frame coincides with a return to some semblance of normalcy for the country. Until that point, everything is up in the air. Like the rest of us, he’s just figuring out how to ride out the pandemic. But for now, you can find him at his gym.





Unicorn

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

**If your libidinous
mind can imagine
it, there's probably
already a term for it**

unicorn (*n*) a person, usually a young bisexual woman, who sexually interacts with a committed heterosexual couple

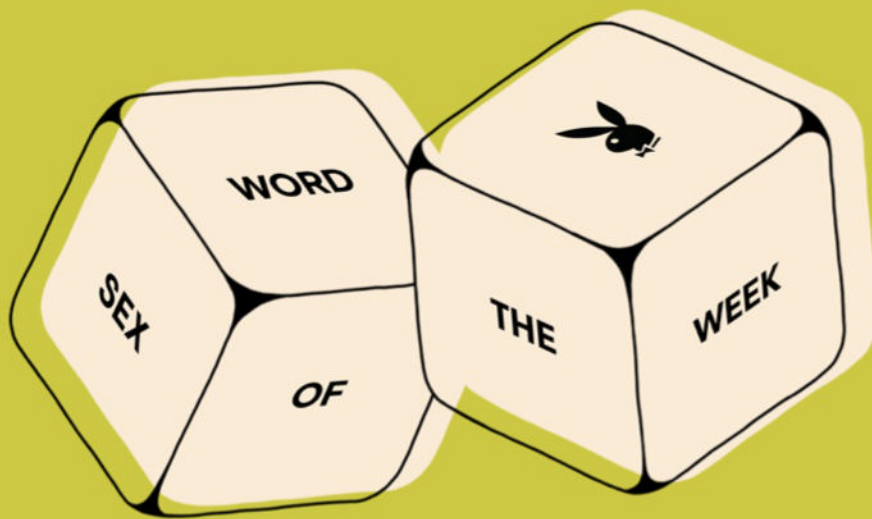
After searching for a third for almost a year, Zach and Abby finally met a perfect unicorn that they wished to welcome into their bedroom lives.

It's time for a quick lesson on the magical creatures that are unicorns. And no, we're not talking about the ones in your favorite young adult novels. In the vast world of polyamory, a unicorn is a term used to refer to p"the third" in a three-way relationship, specifically a woman who is added to the dynamic of a married couple. The woman is usually bisexual, while the couple consists of a heterosexual man and a bisexual woman. She becomes the secondary partner of both the man and woman, with the bond between the couple remaining the primary relationship.

The unicorn isn't expected to develop serious feelings or heartfelt attachments to the committed couple; her only goal is to experience pleasure. It's increasingly a way for young women to sexually explore and achieve sexual agency without the constraints of monogamy. As you might guess, the term is used to imply that such a find is rare in the dating landscape.

"Unicorn hunting" describes the search for such an individual and is a controversial term in the poly community. A common criticism of unicorn-hunting couples is that they often end up treating the woman as a toy in their relationship, an object to act out explicit fantasies upon and then discard when it becomes inconvenient. It can also be seen as straight male wish-fulfillment, in which the male partner is the driving force behind finding a unicorn and the main beneficiary.

However you choose to see unicorns or the couples who seek them out, compassion and respect from all parties inform a major part of successful unicorn scenarios. Unicorns have their own feelings, personal lives and schedules, and couples looking to explore a third would do well to remember this.



WAP

WRITTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KATIE BAILIE

**If your libidinous
mind can imagine
it, there's probably
already a term for it**

WAP (*n*) wet-ass pussy, a vagina that is of great renown and status

Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion's latest joint, m"WAP," went viral over the weekend, debuting at number one on both Spotify and iTunes.

This week's word is a doozy, so hopefully you brought a bucket and a mop. If you spent even a nanosecond of your life online this past weekend, you likely witnessed the song p"WAP" become the women's empowerment anthem we didn't realize we needed. If you successfully avoid the internet at all costs, good for you! But to catch you up, WAP now

stands for "wet-ass pussy." (Sorry, Wireless Access Point and Weatherization Assistance Program, your time in the sun has come to an end.) "WAP" is the latest single from rap goddesses Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, and upon its release on Friday it topped charts, with the accompanying music video racking up 72 million views.

To have a WAP is to have a punani of prestige, one that doesn't tolerate fuckboys or ignored texts or p"faking it" to preserve delicate egos. A WAP's sole mission is pleasure, and it seeks it out on its own terms unapologetically. Women, particularly black women, shouldn't have to sanitize their sexualities to make them more palatable or respectable. This song is a lyrical defense of a woman's right to be nasty. Cardi B said as much in a recent interview: "The song is really nasty. The song always been nasty. It was really hard for me to clean this song up." There you go, folks.

And WAP above all else, stands for an idea—the idea of women being confident in their bodies and wielding their sexual power. To interpret it metaphorically, possessing a WAP is to have full sexual agency at all times. So if you happen to have the opposite of a WAP—a DAP, if you will (which is a normal, common thing; every vagina is different and there's nothing wrong with needing extra help when it comes to lubrication!)—this mantra is still for you, and you have every right to belt it out to the chagrin of any old conservative who might be in earshot.





By **Top Enterprises Publications**



Waist	54 cm
Hips	92 cm
Height	1,72 m
Weight	62 kg
Eyes	honey





My hobbies and interests. Be in the top with Playboy

My goals and career ambitions. I am known worldwide for my covers, editorials, and different publications

My inspiration. Matiasoo.

My favorite quote. Unex-

pected The perfect date.

My biggest crush. Sean Connery, I've been in love with him all my life.

My favorite food: I love the Vegetarian food.

My biggest fear: None

One destination I'd love to visit. I love to be in one day at Dubai

I'm not embarrassed to say: "No"

You can follow me on my Instagram @verovaira







Playboy Interview **Keanu Reeves**

A candid conversation about voting, technology and paparazzi overreach with the notoriously reclusive Matrix star

INTERVIEW BY **MICHAEL FLEMING**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DJACK GUY**

Keanu Reeves is possibly Hollywood's most elusive megastar, an actor who has managed to remain mysterious on the big screen and even more so in real life. But keeping his fans and critics confused and off-guard has paid off handsomely. Reeves, 41, has packed movie theaters by playing an improbable range of characters in some of the most unforgettable films of the past two decades.

Take, for example, the legendary Bill &

Ted's Excellent Adventure, a movie m"just stupid enough to be endearing," as one reviewer put it. The role of Ted could easily have pigeonholed Reeves if the actor had not gone on to appear in parts as varied as a Shakespeare-quoting bisexual hustler in My Own Private Idaho (Vincent Canby called Reeves's performance m"very fine") and a stoic cop in the highly caffeinated Speed, in which he uttered such lines as m"Harry,

there's enough C-4 on this thing to put a hole in the world!"

Then, of course, there is The Matrix and its sequels, in which Reeves's kung fu and slow-motion bullet dodging make Bruce Lee seem slothful. The three Matrix movies, released in 1999 and 2003, earned upward of \$1.6 billion worldwide. Of sci-fi films, only the Star Wars series has made more. Reeves, who shared in the trilogy's profits, took



home more than \$150 million.

Along the way, there were flops—forgettable (and forgotten) movies such as *Feeling Minnesota*, *Chain Reaction* and *Sweet November*—but there were far more hits, from *Much Ado About Nothing*, *River's Edge* and *Little Buddha* to *Something's Gotta Give* and *Constantine*.

Reeves was born in Beirut to an English mother and a father who is part Chinese and part Hawaiian; Reeves's unusual first name is Hawaiian for a "cool breeze over the mountains." His parents split when Reeves was young, and he and his sisters were raised by their mother, mostly in Toronto, where he attended four high schools. He was a skilled ice-hockey goalie, nicknamed the Wall, who dreamed of a pro career—that is, until he discovered acting. He dropped out of school when he was 17 and worked steadily as an actor in Canada before moving to Hollywood at the age of 20.

At a time when his fellow stars are acting out in public as well as on film—Tom Cruise jumping up and down on Oprah's couch, Russell Crowe tossing a telephone across a hotel lobby—Reeves is low-key and silent. His characters say relatively little on-screen, and he says even less off. He has continually declined to comment on some of the most dramatic events in his life, including the tragedy that befell him and his girlfriend Jennifer Syme when their baby was stillborn weeks before its due date in 1999 and Syme's death in a car accident, in 2001. Because of his reluctance to expose his personal life, Reeves remains strangely unknown for such a major star. His interviews are rare, and a lengthy one such as this is almost nonexistent. In addition Reeves avoids the paparazzi, stays out of the limelight and often refuses to answer interviewers' questions at all. That hasn't stopped the rumor mill, however; sketchy blog reports have alleged romances with everyone from Lindsay Lohan to Diane Keaton, his costar in *Something's Gotta Give*. When asked about her supposed affair with Reeves, Keaton responded "with a disbelieving yelp," according to *The New York Times*.

One of Reeves's upcoming movies is *A Scanner Darkly*, based on a futuristic tale by author Philip K. Dick; the movie was shot in live action and then animated. Reeves plays a narcotics officer investigating his own alter ego, a drug-abusing dealer of a dangerous new hallucinogen. "Keanu threw himself into the role," says director Richard Linklater, whose movies include *Dazed and Confused* and *The School of Rock*. "There is a beautiful innocence about him, a direct line of empathy that the audience picks up. He feels things deeply and conveys them without saying anything or even displaying them in his face. I think when he looks in the mirror he doesn't see a leading man or even a good-looking guy. At different times he may see a hobo or a guy in an alley, snuffling through life with no food in his refrigerator." Reeves is also reuniting with Sandra Bullock, his bus-driver companion in *Speed*, for *The Lake House*.

Playboy sent writer Michael Fleming, who most recently interviewed Jamie Foxx and the Rock, to meet with Reeves. His report: "When he arrived at Le Meridien hotel in Los Angeles, Reeves had longish hair and a substantial black beard ringing his boyish face. It almost seemed as if the growth were intended to give him something to hide behind. He wore a black blazer and gray scarf, never taking either off as we chatted for an afternoon. "Reeves's intelligence may show through in his choice of roles and his measured performances, but boy, is he guarded. He shields his private life more than any movie star I've interviewed. I waited for him to open up, but whenever it got personal, he became uncomfortable and quiet. If not loquacious, he was at least gracious and polite—even, I noticed, fanning the smoke from his numerous cigarettes away from me."

PLAYBOY: In your new movie, *A Scanner Darkly*, you return to the genre of *The Matrix*, science fiction, this time with a hallucinogenic animation overlay. Are you a sci-fi, techno-obsessed, geeky kind of

guy?

REEVES: Me? I don't even have a computer.

PLAYBOY: Neo from *The Matrix* has no computer?

REEVES: That's right. It always made [Matrix directors] Larry and Andy Wachowski laugh.

PLAYBOY: How have you avoided owning a computer in 2006?

REEVES: I'm more interested in people than technology. I'm not a gearhead.

PLAYBOY: How about a BlackBerry? Can you be a Hollywood celebrity without one?

REEVES: Yes. With all technology, I am interested in the ideas, what it means sociologically. I love reading about inventions, knowing why and how people use them—the internet and the rest—but I'm far more fascinated by the human aspects. As far as I can tell, devices meant to save you time and help you communicate actually take away time and give you an excuse not to communicate. People like e-mail because they don't have to answer it. You want to talk to people, but you get less time to do it. I prefer letters. I like to write them.

PLAYBOY: In longhand?

REEVES: On a typewriter.

PLAYBOY: Do you use Wite-Out for your mistakes?

REEVES: Nah. I put Xs through mistakes. That's part of the charm.

PLAYBOY: If *Star Wars* is the standard, where does the *Matrix* trilogy rank in the pantheon of science-fiction franchises? Financially, it's number two.

REEVES: I would say we're the new number one. Everyone has their own ranking, but *The Matrix* is definitely my favorite. I still get protective about it. I got so mad when *The Matrix* wasn't nominated for an Academy Award last time.

PLAYBOY: An Academy Award for—

REEVES: At least for the special effects. Are you fucking kidding me? Are you fucking insane?

PLAYBOY: The first *Matrix* movie came out right before the first *Star Wars* prequel. By comparison *The Matrix* was reviewed as fresh and cutting-edge. It developed a cult following and inspired fashion trends, and the entire series took in more than \$1.5 billion. When you first read the script, did you imagine it would become such a sensation?

REEVES: I didn't, though I saw a great script and a great story. The ideas pushed the envelope in science fiction. I had never heard of anything like *The Matrix* before. I hadn't seen any of those ideas before—a guy living in a dream. They were going to slow down the action scenes, and there was this kung fu stuff. I loved all that. I knew it was going to be hard work—I recognized the effort it would take—but it excited me.

PLAYBOY: When you look back, do you remember the effort or the movies' success?

REEVES: It was very exciting to work on those films. I feel very grateful for how my life changed because of them—what I went through, the people I met. Neo has a relationship to humans, to machines and to energy itself. What does he ask for? Peace. I think that's one of the best messages we can strive for. I have strong feelings about that message. That part of it helped me get through the experience.

PLAYBOY: Reportedly, you and numerous co-stars were injured while making those movies. How badly were you banged up?

REEVES: My knees aren't the same. They're just not. I have to get them scoped.

PLAYBOY: Because of the kung fu scenes?

REEVES: Yeah, though it was just movie kung fu, not the real stuff. We hit each other only a couple of times, so it wasn't that bad.

But people broke things. Carrie-Anne Moss hurt her leg, and Hugo Weaving had to have a hole drilled into his hip to drain some fluid. I was taking ice baths and massages and trying not to cry at

night. But would I do it again? Absolutely.

I'm still kind of tired from it, though. I'm still recovering. Five or six months ago I remember saying to a friend that I finally felt as if I'd processed the first Matrix.

PLAYBOY: Five months ago? That film came out in 1999.

REEVES: Yeah, but I'm a sensitive guy. The first shoot was eight months, and the second was 22 months. My stunt double told me I did more wire work than 90 percent of the stuntmen in the business.

PLAYBOY: After shoots like those, do you stay in touch with the directors and cast?

REEVES: Yes. I saw Laurence Fishburne just the other day. I bought him some artwork for his new house. I haven't seen Carrie-Anne for a while. I saw Hugo at a film festival a few months back. All the people we're speaking about are my friends. If I got married, they'd all be invited.

PLAYBOY: When it finally shuts down, how do you get an intensive shoot like The Matrix out of your system? Do you get lost for three weeks?

REEVES: Three weeks? Is that all I get? Normally when I finish work, I'm very tired but also restless. I look to reconnect with friends. I ride my bike.

PLAYBOY: Where?

REEVES: I mainly just ride around town, seeking sunsets and the ocean. I ride around the canyons or Malibu.

PLAYBOY: You've had several notable accidents. Have your injuries affected your riding?

REEVES: I still ride every day, pretty much.

PLAYBOY: Which is your favorite bike?

REEVES: A 1974 Norton Commando 850. It's an English sport touring twin. Comfortable. You can go up to San Francisco in a jump.

PLAYBOY: One of your well-publicized spills temporarily messed up your face pretty well. Do you wear a helmet now?

REEVES: It's the law, so now I do, except when I'm in places that have no helmet laws.

PLAYBOY: A lot is riding on you when you star in a film. Are you contractually restricted from riding motorcycles when you're shooting a movie?

REEVES: Sometimes I have to state my position, to say whether I will or won't ride.

PLAYBOY: You have said you like going on what you call the devil ride. What is it?

REEVES: There are a couple of spots on Mulholland Drive in the Hollywood Hills, where, if there's a good moon out, you can coast all the way down toward the ocean. You shut off your lights and go. It's very quiet. You're guided by the moonlight. It's very pleasant. It's not like I'm howling at the moon, but it's quiet, and you can hear and feel the breeze. There is a certain aspect to riding. You're getting away and enjoying nature and riding. You can't daydream when you ride. You have to be here now.

PLAYBOY: Is the thrill, as well as the danger, part of the attraction?

REEVES: Well, I'm not looking to get into any mishaps.

PLAYBOY: What caused your accidents?

REEVES: I've had a few of them. I crashed a few times. Once a car pulled a U-turn from a parking space in front of me into my lane. The driver couldn't see me coming, and I couldn't get out of the way. That

one is responsible for my fake teeth—my teeth replacements.

PLAYBOY: How badly were you hurt?

REEVES: I sheared some skin off my right shin. I broke my ankle and a couple of teeth. Not so bad.

PLAYBOY: Easy for you to say. And you have a scar on your abdomen. From what?

REEVES: That was from running into the hillside. I took a turn a little too fast and just ran out of road.

PLAYBOY: Do these accidents ever make you consider quitting?

REEVES: No. After an accident I just vow to go a little slower.

PLAYBOY: How quickly do you get back on the bike afterward?

REEVES: As soon as I heal up.

PLAYBOY: In addition to riding, do you work out?

REEVES: I guess it depends on the day.

PLAYBOY: Do you try to stay in shape? What regimen do you have?

REEVES: Eat right, get plenty of rest.

PLAYBOY: Do you go to the gym? Do any Pilates?

REEVES: Nah. I'm an old-fashioned guy. I lift some, and I run.

PLAYBOY: How about fashion trends? What do your long hair and beard say about you? Would you define your look as more slacker or fashion plate?

REEVES: I wouldn't describe myself as a slacker or a fashion plate. I visit both of those worlds. I like to get dressed up once in a while.

PLAYBOY: Do you wear a character around after the workday is over?

REEVES: I tend to bring it home until I feel I know the guy I'm playing. If I'm doing an accent, I may answer the phone in the accent. When I worked on Sam Raimi's *The Gift*, I was going to bars and hanging out, jumping into the truck and wearing thick clothes. I enjoy that process of immersing myself in a character.

PLAYBOY: How much of a stretch was it to play a wife beater in *The Gift*? He was a brutal guy. Besides the accent and clothes, did you bring him home?

REEVES: I said no a lot more than I usually do. I wasn't as polite as I usu-

ally am.

PLAYBOY: Hilary Swank played your wife and was the recipient of your brutality. How did it feel to summon that rage and bully a woman?

REEVES: A part of me was afraid of my violent side. Once Hilary and I were improvising in a trailer. I just kept saying, g'You're lying. You're lying. You're lying.' We were rehearsing this argument, and Sam said, "Every time you say, g'You're lying,' instead of saying it, just hit her." Hilary was like, "No, Donnie, I wasn't " [makes slapping noise] m'Donnie, I wasn't " [slaps] Sam was like, m'Grab her face." This went on until finally I pushed her up against the wall and started taking her pants off. I stopped, but it was very scary. It was like, "Oh, shit. Okay. Now I get it. I get it." It was very frightening.

PLAYBOY: Did it help Swank prepare for her role in *Million Dollar Baby*?

REEVES: [Laughs] Yeah. And by the way, I also learned a bit of... well, that some of the ladies don't mind it, so.... Nah, that's awful to say.

PLAYBOY: In one of your next movies you're playing Hollywood mobster Johnny Stompanato. Catherine Zeta-Jones plays his girlfriend Lana Turner. Stompanato was a small-time L.A. gangster with

*"People like
e-mail because
they don't have
to answer it. I
don't even have
a computer."*



a legendary temper. Turner's daughter, Cheryl, stabbed him to death to save her mother. Was he similar to the character in *The Gift*?

REEVES: I found it interesting that Stompanato had this temper but that he was trying to control and civilize it. He didn't want to be a thug. He didn't want to be Mickey Cohen's tough guy. I liked the struggle of a violent guy who tries to change his nature.

PLAYBOY: By the time of *The Gift*, you had become one of the highest-paid actors in Hollywood. It has been reported that you made more than \$150 million on the three *Matrix* films—one of the more lucrative movie-star paydays in history. Before that you had a reputation for living a modest existence. Does such a windfall dramatically change the way you live?

REEVES: Yes. It definitely changed the way I can live. Absolutely.

PLAYBOY: But has it? How?

REEVES: I can buy my mom a house, which is great. Then I can do the renovation. And yes, I can expand my level of philanthropy. A lot of things in my life extended out. How I am personally isn't really affected by it, but my life is. I'm still pretty sparing, though. I haven't gone nuts. I haven't changed much of my lifestyle. No, I don't have a jet.

PLAYBOY: After having long been content to live in hotels, you bought a house.

As you get older is it more important to put down roots?

REEVES: That's how I would put it. I guess I was looking for something more. Yeah, and this is after living in the Chateau Marmont for four years in the 1990s.

PLAYBOY: What's the best thing about living in a hotel for four years?

REEVES: Room service. Overall it was good fun, but the fun has to stop at some point. It was time to check out. Now it's nice to have a home.

PLAYBOY: Do you make your own bed?

REEVES: I do. It's good to make your own bed and do your own dishes.

PLAYBOY: Did you decorate your house yourself?

REEVES: Yes. It's kind of modern. Modern comfy, if that's possible.

PLAYBOY: How else has your life changed since *The Matrix*? Can you go out and be anonymous, or is that time gone?

REEVES: It's important to do it still. Robert De Niro once spoke about the loss of his privacy, how he missed the ability to be a voyeur, to look at other people. As an actor, you don't want to lose that. I can still walk around, do what I need to and not be bothered much.

PLAYBOY: How does it feel when strangers come up and act as if they know you?

REEVES: It's generally nice if people want to say hi. I can move around the world pretty freely. No one freaks out.

PLAYBOY: Can you still go to the mall—anywhere you want?

REEVES: Yeah, absolutely. I went to the movies the other night. It was fine. I got recognized a couple of times, but it's no big deal. You never get supercomfortable with that, but in my experience it's usually pretty much g"Hi" and "Can you sign this?" which is fine.

PLAYBOY: After three *Matrix* films, you did *Constantine* and

Thumbsucker, an art-house film about a guy with an oral fixation. Upcoming you have *The Lake House*, with Sandra Bullock, and *A Scanner Darkly*—four utterly different types of movies. After the second *Bill & Ted*'s, you played a bisexual hustler in *My Own Private Idaho*. Are you intentionally trying to mix it up? Is one film a reaction to the one that preceded it?

REEVES: One film isn't a reaction to the last as much as it is just finding something I'm interested in. At the same time, I don't want to become g"that guy" or be known for any one thing. I'd like to be able to do any kind of role in any kind of film.

PLAYBOY: Was it difficult for you to shake the perception of being an airhead from *Bill & Ted*'s? Did it make it harder to get the next job?

REEVES: It wasn't as hard for me to shake the perception as it seemed to be for other people. [Laughs] I must have done a good job, because some people thought that was who I was.

PLAYBOY: Were you in high demand for roles that required an air-guitar solo?

REEVES: I never got that. People in the business never seemed to pigeonhole me because of the role, though sometimes I'd get it critically and socially.

PLAYBOY: Now critics finally seem to appreciate your work more than at any other time. Have you gotten better, or have they caught on?

REEVES: [Groans] Have I gotten better, or have they caught on? I feel like I've grown in my craft. I plan to continue that. In terms of catching on, I don't really know. Whatever.

PLAYBOY: You received good reviews for *My Own Private Idaho*. Your on-screen relationship with River Phoenix is as intimate and daring as the relationship in *Brokeback Mountain*. What was the reaction to that movie?

REEVES: *My Own Private Idaho* was well received, but

the reaction had a lot to do with the film's structure. In the middle you have Shakespeare. You have street kids, homosexuality, father-son stuff. There is no straight, direct dramatic narrative.

PLAYBOY: If it had come out today, would it be embraced like *Brokeback Mountain*? Is there more openness to the depiction of homosexual and bisexual relationships now than when *My Own Private Idaho* came out in 1991?

REEVES: I think so. *Brokeback Mountain* has been put on a platform as a love story. Is it a more open world because it's a story about love between two men? Well, we've got gay marriage now. So I guess, yes. *Idaho* still holds up, by the way. I saw it recently. It has aged well.

PLAYBOY: And you? Are there qualities in your acting now that you're 40 that weren't there when you were 20 or even 30?

REEVES: I don't know. I don't look at myself like that. I just look forward to what happens next.

PLAYBOY: Does it worry you to get older in a business that reveres youth?

REEVES: No, I don't have that worry. I look at it differently. I look

"Robert De Niro once spoke about the loss of his privacy, how he missed the ability to be a voyeur, to look at other people. As an actor, you don't want to lose that."

at Macbeth and wonder, Do I have the stature yet? Do I look too young? That's one I'd like to do. I want to be able to do it and feel like I know what I'm talking about. I just hope I don't have to age too hard to earn it.

PLAYBOY: You have said you stunk in Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula*. What was wrong with your performance?

REEVES: When I went into the picture, I had done a lot of work—three films in a year. I was psychically beat-up, fragile and not so confident. Actually, I saw that film again about a year ago, and it was okay. As arch as all the other performances were, mine was suitable.

PLAYBOY: Speed made you a bankable leading man. Did you sense in advance that it would?

REEVES: No. What I saw in the script was an action film and a chance to humanize the action hero. At the time, that type of role was changing after Bruce Willis did *Die Hard*. My performance was in the spirit of the change to more character-based interpretations of the action hero.

PLAYBOY: Why did you turn down *Speed 2*? In retrospect it was a good decision, but the original *Speed* was a blockbuster.

REEVES: Aw, this is all ancient history.

PLAYBOY: But it's not a painful memory?

REEVES: [Laughs] Good ancient history.

PLAYBOY: Why did you say no?

REEVES: At the time, I didn't feel the script and story were things that needed to be made.

PLAYBOY: Because a boat moving through water doesn't visually convey the danger of a speeding bus?

REEVES: That was one of my major points. [Laughs] My idea was to have my character traveling through the whole film, trying to propose to Sandra with all these obstacles getting in the way. That would have been charming. But also, when the film came around, I wasn't ready to go run and jump. I was in the middle of finishing *Chain Reaction*. I just didn't feel like running and jumping anymore. So I played Hamlet, and that was fine.

PLAYBOY: Years later why did you agree to make *Something's Gotta Give*? It had all the markings of a corny chick flick, though it became a hit and revived the genre of smart adult films.

REEVES: I thought it was a great story, incredibly well written by director Nancy Meyers. And I got the chance to work with Jack Nicholson and Diane Keaton. I liked the humanity of my character, that he was a heart doctor in a story about matters of the heart. There was a nice dignity to him, so I didn't mind not getting the girl.

PLAYBOY: Were you nervous working with Nicholson? Were you more nervous working with him than with other iconic co-stars?

REEVES: I was probably most nervous at a rehearsal of *The Devil's Advocate* with Al Pacino. It was in a studio loft in Manhattan, where we sat on a couple of chairs that were substituting for a subway bench. It was the first time I got to roll up my sleeves with a master. Yeah, I was nervous. But Pacino is a very generous actor, a lovely man. That got me past it. This was my opportunity, as Laurence Fishburne always says, to swing.

PLAYBOY: To swing?

REEVES: You know, g"Let's swing, man. Let's go. Let's hit it out of the park."

PLAYBOY: You left high school to act. Was it a difficult decision?

REEVES: No, because I'd made the decision to act before I went

to high school.

PLAYBOY: Was your mother worried about your quitting school?

REEVES: No, she was very supportive. No one tried to hold me back.

PLAYBOY: While it lasted, were you a good student?

REEVES: I was okay. I went to four high schools in five years. I went to one right after grade school for two years. Then I went to a performing-arts high school for a year. I got kicked out and went to a Catholic boys' high school to play hockey. That's where I did my first play. After that I went to a free school so I could work while getting my education. Then I dropped out.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any misgivings about not finishing high school and following the traditional path to college?

REEVES: No, because I'd started working as an actor. That's what I wanted to do.

PLAYBOY: When did you initially go to Hollywood to act?

REEVES: I was 20. I got a green card, got in my old car and drove across the border from Canada. I stayed half a year with my stepfather, who was a writer and director. He let me stay in his guest bedroom because I didn't know anybody out here. Then I made some friends, and I got an apartment and a roommate.

PLAYBOY: Were you at all homesick?

REEVES: Not at all. I was so ready to leave. I'd moved out of the house when I was 17 or 18.

PLAYBOY: How long did it take you to get established? Were there setbacks?

REEVES: I had the courage of youth. I had done a movie of the week in Canada. By the time I arrived in L.A., I had a manager and an agent. I came out with my head shots and went to auditions. After eight months of hearing no, I got my first break in a TV movie.

PLAYBOY: Now, after being in L.A. for 20 years, are you cynical about Hollywood and the movie business?

REEVES: Absolutely not. Hopefully I never will be.

PLAYBOY: There's probably not much ice hockey in Hollywood, yet you were an ice-hockey goalie in high

school. Do you still play?

REEVES: I played five or six years ago, when my knees were better. I played a lot of hockey. I played in some under-30 and then over-30 leagues in L.A. I got awards for best goalie and best goals against. One year I got a trophy.

PLAYBOY: Your nickname when you played in high school, the Wall, suggests you were a force to be reckoned with. Did you ever aspire to play pro hockey?

REEVES: When I was 17, I was on the edge. I had a tryout for a major junior A team, which I didn't go to because I did a play instead.

PLAYBOY: After *The Matrix*, motorcycle accidents and ice hockey, how bad are your knees?

REEVES: Now it's hard for me even to play. My knees will get swollen. And then there was the neck surgery.

PLAYBOY: For what?

REEVES: I just had two cervical discs removed, but I'm still going to play some hockey. I'd like to get back in the net.

PLAYBOY: Tabloids track most stars' every step. They report rumors, but you generally seem to exist outside their glare. How have you managed that?

REEVES: I lead a very quiet life. I don't get out much. It's kind of sad, but—ah, well.

*"No one wants
their private life
intruded upon by
long-lens cam-
eras and flash-
bulbs."*



PLAYBOY: How troubling are the tabloids and paparazzi?

REEVES: No one wants their private life intruded upon by long-lens cameras and flashbulbs. It's more prevalent in Hollywood than it used to be. There are more photos of people going to eat and coming out of clubs. It's unavoidable.

PLAYBOY: Most stars engage lawyers to deny stories and threaten lawsuits as soon as a tabloid publishes something scurrilous. When unfounded reports surfaced that you'd married David Geffen, did you feel the need to defend yourself and refute them?

REEVES: No. When you say defend, in that case it comes down to making a judgment about being gay or not. I try not to live my life by what other people say.

PLAYBOY: Did the report about Geffen make you angry?

REEVES: No, man. To me, it's just bullshit. Like I said, rumors, all that kind of stuff. It's like, whatever.

PLAYBOY: Do you read the tabloids? Do you understand the appeal?

REEVES: People were gossiping about what the king and queen were doing way back when. It's just human nature. We like talking about other people.

PLAYBOY: Do you get drawn in?

REEVES: I get inoculated every year, so I don't.

PLAYBOY: Are you forgiving of the press?

REEVES: I don't think it has the right to peer over the fence or stalk me. It doesn't have a right to my private life.

PLAYBOY: Do you imagine using your celebrity to push politics the way Bono does?

REEVES: I don't have it in me. He's a remarkable man and a remarkable performer. I don't have that kind of scale in me, but I am involved in foundations.

PLAYBOY: Could you see yourself ever publicly backing a political candidate?

REEVES: I like to do things quietly. That's my style. For now.

PLAYBOY: George Clooney has made a series of political movies—*Syriana* and *Good Night, and Good Luck*. Do you ever consider making movies that would push your politics?

REEVES: It's not to my taste. It's admirable and important but not my style right now. My life now is smaller-scale. I get involved in certain philanthropic entities, but I like to go the private way.

PLAYBOY: Can you vote in the United States?

REEVES: No, I can't. I'm still a Canadian citizen.

PLAYBOY: Do you vote there?

REEVES: I don't participate in Canada, either. I guess one can say that, beyond social and human politics, I'm not a political person. I haven't voted. This is something I'd actually like to change.

PLAYBOY: Do you want to vote here?

REEVES: Yeah, and become a U.S. citizen. I realize I want to participate in different ways than I have been able to.

PLAYBOY: According to press reports, you never had a relationship with your father. Is he in your life now?

REEVES: No.

PLAYBOY: Do you know where he lives?

REEVES: In Hawaii.

PLAYBOY: Might you try to establish a relationship with him?

REEVES: I don't know. I just don't know.

PLAYBOY: Are you close with your mother and the rest of your

family? Where are they?

REEVES: I have a sister in Italy and one in Seattle. My mother lives here. My family is pretty close. We see each other on holidays, whenever we can.

PLAYBOY: Along with acting, you apparently enjoy rock and roll. Do you still play bass in a rock band?

REEVES: No, I don't. I stopped about eight months ago. The band wanted to go on tour and make records, as opposed to just playing when we could. I felt like I was in their way. I stepped aside.

PLAYBOY: The band got much of its attention—and a record deal—primarily because you were in it.

REEVES: Yeah, but we hard-earned that after, like, seven years.

PLAYBOY: While your fame helped in some ways, did it also put pressure on the band?

REEVES: In the beginning, yeah. But if you're going to play music, shut up and play. If you don't want it to happen, stay home. Still, sometimes it was uncomfortable. We were a new band, and 3,000 people were coming out to see us play.

PLAYBOY: Where do you feel more naked: playing a new song live or opening in a play?

REEVES: Both sound pretty good. I like that excitement. I'm most comfortable onstage performing. When I'm acting onstage, I feel very much at home, more so than I do when performing music.

PLAYBOY: What gave you a bigger rush, opening for Bon Jovi, seeing *The Matrix* for the first time or being onstage in a play?

REEVES: Opening night onstage, but opening for Bon Jovi was fun. That was one of our first big concerts. Being amplified in the Forum is pretty awesome. The drums are like, boom! The bass. You feel the whole place moving. There's so much sound coming out, your pants are vibrating.

PLAYBOY: Is there more camaraderie between bandmates on the road or between cast members on location?

REEVES: They rival each other. You probably learn more about the personal foibles of the band on the road in a van or bus. You learn what everybody looks like at four a.m. The musician's life is a little more of the pirate's.

PLAYBOY: Will you play in another band?

REEVES: No.

PLAYBOY: Because you know you aren't likely to achieve in music what you have as an actor?

REEVES: No, it's not about that. I enjoyed the creative process. I loved playing shows and making music. There's nothing like writing a song for the first time and having a band come together and play it and then playing it live.

PLAYBOY: Then why did you quit the band?

REEVES: I'm 41 years old. I did the band for about nine years—long enough. It's just about finding time. I have too much else to do.

PLAYBOY: As you think about the future, do you see yourself sitting around the house, with a bunch of kids running around and a gut? George Clooney, a terminal bachelor, says it'll never happen for him. But he has a pot-bellied pig.

REEVES: Well, that goes to show you. We all need surrogates. It's nature. It's Darwin calling. What is it? g“Nature is railing a siren song, and not to answer is not to belong. The world must be peopled.” Yeah, that impulse is definitely alive and well in me. Yeah. A gut and some kids? Why not?

*"I lead a very
quiet life. I don't
get out much. It's
kind of sad, but—
ah, well."*

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On Shirts and Skins in the NBA

They might be well-intentioned, but the basketball league's superficial, corporate-approved "statement" jerseys are barely worth a shrug

BY **MIKE JORDAN**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JACOB ROCHESTER**

It's easy to understand why LeBron James, the NBA's biggest star, decided not to display one of 29 league-approved statements on the back of his Los Angeles Lakers jersey this season in place of his own name.

Two years ago, in one of her most famous instances of white nationalist tap-dancing, Laura Ingraham was miffed that James dared criticize Donald Trump. "It's always unwise to seek political advice from someone who gets paid a hundred million dollars a year to bounce a ball," she told viewers of *The Ingraham Angle*. High-pitched indignance rose in her voice as she mentioned the money.

She concluded her race-baiting two-minute monologue by advising James, one of the most important figures in sports history, to "shut up and dribble." Don't speak out on social issues.

Ingraham's slimy commentary is relevant again today, with the NBA allowing players to put certain social messages on their jersey backs. Disdain for athletes who dare have their own political opinions is not uncommon; Senator Kelly Loeffler of Georgia, minority owner of the Atlanta Dream franchise, said the only message she wants to see on WNBA players' jerseys is the American flag.

Yet the NBA signed off on more than two dozen acceptable statements, including "Speak Up," "Anti-Racist" and "How Many More." In some respects, letting these highly visible individuals "speak" while they actually are dribbling

feels like a sincere gesture. But like a tattoo, it superficially allows players to wear their hearts on their sleeves, to adorn themselves in language signifying a sort of dignified dissent. Forty-eight players will display "Black Lives Matter," including Houston Rockets point guard Russell Westbrook. Just five picked "Love Us," including 2020 Slam Dunk Contest winner Derrick Jones of the Miami Heat; four selected "Say Her Name," a slogan that many began to use after the death of Sandra Bland and continues to be a rallying cry following the inexcusable police killing of Breonna Taylor. Of the permitted messages, the most popular, according to NBA.com, is "Equality"—77 players (counting the entire Dallas Mavericks roster) will sport the word across their shoulders.

Speaking of shoulders, being a popular professional athlete in America is a little reminiscent of Atlas, one of the Titans of Greek mythology. Not unlike pro players, the Titans were seemingly unrestricted by normal human limitations, achieved great things, inspired others to be more like them and were worshipped for their greatness. When the Titans were defeated by the Olympians, Atlas was made into an example: His body belonged to the conquerors. Atlas was forced to carry the celestial spheres of the heavens on his shoulders. These spheres were said to be made of quintessence, defined by Merriam-Webster as "the essence of a thing in its purest and most concentrated form."

It appears the NBA has begun this pandemic season of basketball with a quintessential example of missing the point. They seem to have been more interested in telegraphing ownership over players instead of giving them freedom on the court to express in their own words solidarity with fans on racial inequality, social injustice, police brutality and extrajudicial killings of unarmed Black men and women.

Along with actual games, these modern titans of the NBA may win the hearts and minds of people who don't yet understand the

stakes (that is, if the season survives). But by requiring all the jersey "protest" statements to be management-approved, the league has won the real battle for control of the collective narrative. This is why the NBA's statement-making jerseys are barely worth a shrug.

I too wouldn't wear a jersey with someone else's message on my back. Racial inequities in professional sports, from ownership to coaching, are well-documented. Today, as the U.S. is being called to account by African Americans and other minority groups voicing their experiences with racism, highly visible Black athletes are again providing a platform for national conversations on injustice and systemic oppression.

But quasi-customized jerseys bearing pre-selected phrases are hardly what the Founding Fathers fought for, nor what enslaved Africans died for. If we're being real, it's a flaccid attempt by the NBA to feign allyship with the people who suffer most from American oppression.

Underneath it all is the question of ownership. Do players own the shirts on their backs, or even their own bodies, as contractually bound NBA athletes? This is significant, considering that the U.S. was essentially built on the backs of Black Americans whose backs were lashed with whips hundreds of years ago. And under the "leadership" of Donald Trump, Blacks are lashed today with words of intolerance and hate, excusing others to express domination over our bodies.

Fans expect players to carry and amplify messages they themselves aren't empowered to spread as broadly. Yet if these messages have to be negotiated beforehand, they don't really belong to the players; they belong to the owners. And by putting the owners' messages on the backs of players, by erasing those players' names and voices, the teams essentially treat the players as their own property.

Without more owners with Black skin, it doesn't matter what's on the shirt a player wears. Ultimately, they're still being told to shut up and dribble.

Shit, if I were LeBron James, I'd wear my own name too.

I too wouldn't wear a jersey with someone else's message on my back.

If we're being real, it's a flaccid attempt by the NBA to feign allyship with the people who suffer most from American oppression.

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A woman with long dark hair is seen from the back, wearing a purple lace backless top. She is standing in a kitchen with dark wood cabinets and a stainless steel oven. The text "Beyond Beautiful" is written in a white cursive font above the name "Emily Alexandra Guglielmo", which is written in a large, light blue sans-serif font. The name "Guglielmo" is written in a white cursive font below the name "Emily Alexandra".

Beyond Beautiful
Emily Alexandra
Guglielmo

Model @emilyguglielmo

Photography by **Jai Jacob Photo**
PR Lenola PR









You've done a lot of work as a model and actress and are even locally famous in the Tampa Bay area. How and when did this all happen?! What were your goals when you started and do you feel you've accomplished them? I would say I really started modeling after high school in college, around 21 years old. I was asked by Playboy to shoot for them on their TV shows. I started getting booked for commercials and featured extra work on movies like Spring Breakers and Magic Mike! I love to model and act! I'm locally famous in the Tampa Bay area as I was the face of MOR-TV for five years. You can catch me on nationwide commercials and infomercials promoting all types of household products health products, and more!

You're a professional mermaid! How long does it take to squeeze into your mermaid costume and how do you move around in it? It takes about 10-15 minutes and I must use a water base lubricant, or coconut oil to squeeze in since it's full silicone rubber! I feel that the coconut oil is much cleaner and safer.

We also love that Emily Alexandra Cosmetics donates a portion of profits to your own non-profit organization, Supporting Water. What was your most memorable moment you've had running this non-profit? We finally arrived in Africa and I was able to really get my feet wet - no pun intended! Actually being on the ground in Kenya myself and being part

of the mission firsthand to see what our work is actually doing... was life-changing.

Describe your perfect day off when you're not modeling or working on your business or non-profit. A perfect day is, I get to sleep in a little bit, work out, go get an iced coffee, eat a good meal, read a book, study Spanish and ASL and go for a bike ride in the evening!

Favorite movies and shows? The Kardashians show is my guilty pleasure!

What is your favorite type of character to play as an actress? Tough girl/goofy Tomboy/lesbian, or professional adult.



What's the best way for people to see more of you? I made an OnlyFans account and don't think there are other sexy mermaids out there - so it looks like I've got myself a niche. People can also follow me on Instagram @emilyguglielmo and @theamericanmermaid.



A photograph of a woman's torso and arm. She is wearing a bright red, possibly latex, dress with a black beaded necklace. She is also wearing long, black, ribbed gloves. She is holding a large, round, red handbag with a gold-colored strap. The background is a solid teal color.

F*CK YOU, PAY ME

Playboy talks to several financial dommes on the challenges and triumphs of draining bank accounts for a living

BY **JADE GOMEZ**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GRACHIKOVA LARISA**



It's not exactly news that porn viewership has surged in the pandemic. When a country is gripped by uncertainty and isolation, the simple pleasure of jerking off can seem like all that's left. When you couple that with soaring unemployment and a nosedive in disposable income, of course people will look to sustain their sexual desires on a small budget—a.k.a. the free porn from tube sites or affordable subscriptions to OnlyFans pages. But what happens if blowing your budget is your kink?

Goddess Alexis's days don't usually start until lunchtime and end at three in the morning. Before her bedtime, a submissive contacted her to meet up. He arrived in a Tesla sporting a ski mask and handed off \$500 in cash. A few hours later, he returned with another \$500. The Los Angeles-based financial dominatrix recounts this as a normal day; sometimes she wakes up to hundreds of dollars in tributes across her various payment methods. She also has a video on her Twitter page of a man crawling on all fours, kissing and licking her shoes, with over 11,000 views. At one point, she kicks him in the face.

In another video that went viral, Southern financial dominatrix Mistress Marley is seen walking an older white man on a leash during North Carolina Central University's homecoming event. The video, captioned with "she brought her sugar daddy to homecoming" and laugh emojis, has over 3 million views. Marley was quick to refute that characterization. "That's not my sugar daddy, it's my sub lol he pays for me to control him," she replied—not expecting the onslaught of praise from hundreds of people. This interaction, like all the others mentioned in this piece, is consensual.

The sex industry is easy enough to enter, and the increased popularity of OnlyFans in the past year has made even the most inexperienced person a bona fide adult star with nothing but a smartphone. Although still relatively obscure, financial domination being seen as an easy payday has led to an influx of newcomers diving headfirst into an industry that is far more complicated.

Goddess Jaim, a 21-year-old full-time financial dominatrix, was struggling to make ends meet. In addition to going to school full-time for forensic science, Jaim worked nights as an Uber driver from 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. After Uber updated its policy for how old a driver's car can be, she was left without a job. "I literally searched online for 'ways to make money,'" Jaim says with a giggle. "And then I came across findom."

After a failed stint as a sugar baby, financial domination seemed much more aligned with Jaim's personality. She initially started as a catfish dominatrix, a subset of the fetish that is not as profitable but less of a privacy concern. Catfish dominatrices create social media profiles posing as celebrities like Gigi Hadid or Kylie Jenner, or use photos of Instagram models while making it clear that they are not who they appear to be. The thrill of being scammed, as well as no expectation of loyalty beyond a transaction, makes it appealing for submissives of the fetish, but Jaim was dissatisfied.

Within a few weeks, she had scrubbed her catfish persona in favor of her actual photos. Within four months, Jaim was netting between \$2,500 and \$5,000 a month.

It hasn't always been this easy to find communities and resources to get into this specific subset of domination. For

Taylor Knight, it just fell into her lap.

At 18, Knight took an acting gig as a "decoy" on Maury. The premise was simple: When couples with a cheating boyfriend or husband would attend the show, Knight would be placed with them to see if they'd flirt with her. Most did, and the footage would be played back for the audience and their displeased girlfriends. Due to her self-described "bratty" attitude, Knight began receiving fan mail at the studio, ranging from flowers and gifts to hundreds of dollars in cash.

This was the early 2000s, and paid subscription sites for solo performers were more common. Knight capitalized on that. Using a monthly subscription model that allowed access to her wish list, payment information and a weekly cam show, she found herself making thousands without ever getting naked. "I even had homework slaves on there, so I never had to do homework for school,"

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Knight recalls. "It started to do well very quickly. By the third or fourth month I was making \$12,000 a month."

Nearly 15 years later, Knight easily makes over six figures through the dedicated fanbase she curated almost entirely by accident.

For dommes like Goddess Alexis, findom was a way to navigate sex work in a much more comfortable way. After getting into sex work through a premium Snapchat and OnlyFans in late 2019 as a way to earn extra money to attend a rave, she recognized the underlying nature of the interactions with her primarily male clientele.

"I realized I do identify as queer, and I'm mostly attracted to women," she

"I even had homework slaves on there, so I never had to do homework for school."

says. "I had a problem being mean to men because I wanted them to give me the money, and I'd give them the content. I wanted it to be transactional."

After this discovery, Alexis' findom career has become mutually pleasurable for both her and her subs. She considers herself a safe space for her subs to explore their kinks, no matter how extreme. Typical sessions include cosplaying as a character on Skype, blackmail sessions in which subs provide their own embarrassing photos or information and even in-person meet-ups that involve public humiliation.

Despite her conservative Southern upbringing—

her parents kicked her out at age 18 when she refused to stop dating girls—Alexis vowed to keep an open and sympathetic mind toward her subs, even if she engages in consensual torture. "I am very big on believing that people are good and wanting to think that everyone deserves love and acceptance because that's what I want in return," she explains. "I'm open to giving a sub a safe space to try those kinks out. I think that's a cool thing that helps

them come back."

Despite Covid-19 leaving many people uncertain about their financial futures, Alexis has been able to earn as much as \$15,000 in a single month from OnlyFans subscriptions, initial tributes, cash meets and virtual drain sessions. With this success comes the privilege to take a step back from work, which Alexis did after the tragic killing of George Floyd.

The Black Lives Matter movement has pushed for people to support Black-owned businesses and other projects, and it has carried over into the sex industry. Black sex workers have always been the most vulnerable demographic in the scene, because the criminalization of sex work goes hand in hand with the over-policing of Black people and their communities.

As Prostitution in New York City: Answers to Some Questions, a research paper published in 1977 by New York Women in Criminal Justice, notes: "There is little hard information on the ethnicity, birthplace or income of New York City prostitutes. Data from police records, although useful, describe only those women who have been arrested; these are disproportionately non-white. Racial and economic discrimination enter into the prostitution picture: White women are more likely to become call girls, and they are less likely to work the heavily policed Times Square area."

The inherent racism built into work environments extends into the sex industry even more, as Black

and Brown women are both hypersexualized and penalized for their sexuality. It's why aesthetics associated with Black women, such as elaborate nails, hair and jewelry, are commodified as mainstream fashion on non-Black women but Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion were shamed for the lyrical content and music video of their recent song "WAP."

For 33-year-old King Kourt, being a Black domme was at first disheartening. "You look at people I started with at the same time, and it seemed like they were making money very fast compared to me," she notes. For Kourt, findom is a side hustle that she engages in apart from her full-time job in the medical field. She calls it "black female supremacy" as a means of taking ownership of her sexuality.

"I'm a plus-size black woman," Kourt says. "Of course, I'm probably fetishized. The fact that I put a price tag on it felt right for me."

With the help of Black Domme Sorority, a support system founded by Mistress Marley, Kourt found a tight-knit group of fellow Black women navigating a primarily white industry. Much like other domme groups, members promote each other's content, vent their frustrations and receive mentorship from more experienced dommes. In an industry that anyone can join in a few simple clicks, that intimate mentorship can provide a world of a difference, especially with the shared experience of marginalization.

Mistress Marley isn't the only one who holds classes for dommes. There is an entire market for this sort of education. Experienced dommes such as Knight and Prague-based Lucky DeVille capitalize on this through virtual classes, e-books and personal mentoring as a way to guide newer talent through the ins and outs of growing a brand. DeVille's website, FinDom101, explores not only the growth of a personal brand, but also the ethics that come with engaging in such a grey area of kink.

SESTA/FOSTA, two bills signed into law by President Donald Trump in 2018, were supposedly designed to fight online sex trafficking. What they actually do is persecute sex workers and make them less safe. The bills allow internet platforms on which sexual activity is discussed to be heavily censored and, in some cases, held liable even if illegal activity does not occur. Combined with other anti-sex work rules and regulations put in place both online and in real life, something as simple as receiving payments from online processors can be frozen if it's suspected to be related to sexual content and activity.

Dommes such as Alexis and Knight take extra precautions with lawyers to ensure they are protected, whether it's by creating contracts with subs or making sure certain activities and transactions aren't legal risks. In particular, blackmail kink can be dangerous for many dommes, as subs can later sue for something they initially requested. As a result, many dommes will not engage in it.

Although there are countless resources for



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dommes, there are not nearly as many for submissives. RJ runs the Findom Club, a resource for both dommes and subs who want to get started in the fetish. RJ has been in the scene longer than most, having stumbled upon findom by chance in an AOL chat room in the 1990s. After engaging in an argument with a young man, RJ received threats from the man saying he knew where RJ lived and would hurt him unless he mailed him his printer and other valuables. RJ found himself at the post office sending everything from his printer to his CD player. The threats were empty, but RJ found a fetish he has now been engaged in for over 25 years.

On the Findom Club website, RJ has compiled his decades of experience, making sure to advocate for subs' mental health and safety. "Part of the challenge is there are people with some serious mental health issues that are victims of their fetish," he says as he scrolls through an exhaustive survey used to gather information on the community. In the Controlling/Quitting section of his website, there is a chart for subs to use to evaluate their dependence on the fetish. It emphasizes balancing real-life friendships with the kink, setting budgets and taking breaks. Sometimes, however, that responsibility is not recognized by the submissive.

"So many subs will take out loans for you. They will drain their whole bank account for you if you let them," Jaim warns. "Personally, I couldn't do that with a clear conscience because I'd be ruining their lives." Most dommes are of a similar mindset, emphasizing the personal responsibility to keep subs' mental and financial health in check so subs can come back for more.

Kourt recalls a fantasy in which a sub wanted her to lock him up in chastity belt and throw away the key. "That's hot, but in reality I'll put the key in my back pocket," she says with a laugh.







Organization Spotlight *Community Justice Exchange*

What does a world without
prisons and police look like?
This organization has a vision
for a community-led society
that can do better

INTRODUCTION BY **TORI LYNN ADAMS**

With viewership of 13th, Ava DuVernay's 2016 documentary about the insidious rise in mass incarceration, surging by 4,665 percent in the weeks after George Floyd's death, it's clear that the Black Lives Matter protests are impacting the way the masses view our criminal justice system. But four years after the film's release, we still see rampant incarceration and injustice across the country. So the question is, What do we do to combat it? Community Justice Exchange is one of the crucial organizations working to put an end to criminalization in all its forms.

In 2016, the organization's founder and director, Pilar Weiss, launched the National Bail Fund Network, a directory of bail funds accessible to people affected by incarceration. Realizing that its initial focus solely on the bail system was too narrow, she founded Community Justice Exchange two years later to create a nationwide framework to organize and address the multifaceted issue of criminal justice reform.

"We started Community Justice Exchange in order to support grassroots groups that were working on combating detention in all its forms, including probation, parole, court fees and fines, pretrial detention, immigration detention, supervision, surveillance and, of course, bail," Weiss tells me. With 10 core team members across the country and organizations in 35 states, the group has effectively spread its resources to the individuals and organizations that need them most.

What follows is an edited conversation between Weiss and I about the organization's challenges, triumphs and vision for a more just society.

PLAYBOY: Can you break down why mass incarceration is unjust and why there's a need to combat it?

PILAR WEISS: So many people across the country are impacted by mass incarceration—nearly half of the people in the United States have a close relative who has been incarcerated. It has profound effects on people's livelihoods and their family units. My family and my community have personally been affected by incarceration and criminalization, so it has always been top of mind for me.

PLAYBOY: In a perfect world, what would our justice system look like?

WEISS: It's an exciting time right now because folks who were not familiar with the long tradition of analysis around what it would look like to abolish the prison system are starting to become acquainted with it. We have to dismantle

"Since March, the funds that are part of the National Bail Fund Network have paid bail and bond to free over 5,000 people."

this humongous system that, in many places, soaks up a significant part of city budgets so it's not going to happen overnight.

Ultimately, we should figure out new ways to address harm. We're not saying that harm is going to stop; we're saying that jails and prisons are not a way to solve it. We need to completely revise how we deal with community safety. The vision is that there are no prisons or police, and instead we reinvest in community services and resources.

PLAYBOY: What are some of the more pressing obstacles your organization faces?

WEISS: The systems we're working to dismantle are incredibly powerful, well-funded and secretive. For example, the administration keeps changing laws to make seeking asylum practically impossible and to encourage the police, Department of Homeland Security and ICE to make arrests and put people in immigration detention centers. We're working against a system that's incredibly powerful and incredibly committed to oppressing people.

PLAYBOY: What is your focus as an organization right now?

WEISS: We're working on a lot of issues related to Covid. Jails and detention centers have become hotspots for Covid, so we have been pushing for the release of people and the end of jailing people pretrial. We have had some success with that—since March, the funds that are part of the National Bail Fund Network have paid bail and bond to free over 5,000 people—but oftentimes people are released under supervision. We continue to push back on that and advocate for people truly being free. Also, a lot of courts are postponing and rescheduling their court dates because of Covid. In the past, people would be penalized or rearrested for missing their court date, so we're trying to point out that double standard and make long-term changes to penalization.

PLAYBOY: How has the legalization of cannabis in various states affected your work?

WEISS: Legalizing the use or sale of cannabis might reduce the number of people being arrested for those reasons, but that's just the first layer. The system has not dealt with the fact that there are many people in jails and prisons because of three-strikes laws or the fact that someone's past record might be affecting their life right now. There's been some work around expungement and the review of cases, but it's happening slowly.

We haven't seen a mass decrease in the jail population though, which tells us that cops who used to arrest people for marijuana possession could now be arresting people for something else. People are still being racially profiled. Traffic stops and deportation are

still huge problems that affect Black and Latinx communities.

PLAYBOY: What has been a rewarding experience that has stood out during your time with CJE?

WEISS: We've often had multiple organizations come together across different states to make sure that somebody's bond is paid and that there's a plan to get them back to their family. Seeing that level of collaboration between groups that are standing up for a stranger has restored my faith in humanity. That was part of the reason we named the organization Community Justice Exchange. Oftentimes the court proceedings are "the people vs. so and so." So as a community we have to come back and say, "No, you're not going to do that in our name."

PLAYBOY: What are some actionable ways people can support your organization and your work?

WEISS: Donate. Get in touch with local organizations and volunteer. There are so many different ways to support the work; sometimes it's monetary, sometimes it's with people power and sometimes it's with folks having tough conversations with their loved ones and educating them about what is happening in the world.



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